INTRODUCTION

Demonstration has been the cornerstone of claims to knowledge since at least the time of Aristotle.¹ But demonstration, and, more specifically, the extended deductive argumentation that forms its backbone, has a history. As is widely agreed, that history begins with Parmenides of Elea, in whose poem we find the first recorded extended deductive argument — and with it, the first outline of a demonstration.²

This is not the only reason why Parmenides has won acclaim, even veneration, from leading Western thinkers. Since the time of Plato³ (and — to judge from Parmenides’ influence on Zeno, Melissus, Democritus, and others — probably before), philosophers of many stripes, from Hegel⁴ to Heidegger,⁵ Russell⁶ to Popper⁷ to Anscombe,⁸ have celebrated Parmenides’ unique importance as

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¹ See esp. Arist. Top. 100a2 ff.
³ See e.g. Pl. Soph. 241d, Tht. 183e–84a.
⁴ See e.g. Hegel (1833) 296–7: ‘Mit Parmenides hat das eigentliche Philosophieren angefangen.’ (‘Real philosophy begins with Parmenides.’)
⁵ See e.g. the rhapsodic remarks at Heidegger (2000) 100–03, 145–54, where he enshrines Parmenides as the founder of Being (even, with Heraclitus, ‘the founder of all thinking’, p. 145), the first thinker to thematize Being-as-such and so open the field of ontology.
⁶ See e.g. Russell (1972) 55: ‘What makes Parmenides historically important is that he invented a form of metaphysical argument that . . . is to be found in most subsequent metaphysicians down to and including Hegel. He is often said to have invented logic, but what he really invented was metaphysics based on logic.’
⁷ See e.g. Popper (1998a) 146, where we read of ‘the almost unlimited power still exerted over Western scientific thought by the ideas of a great man who lived about 2,500 years ago: Parmenides of Elea’; see the same work for a discussion of Parmenides’ revolutionary conception of knowledge as the defining feature of Western science and rationalism (pp. 159–60). It is telling that Heidegger and Popper, whose mutual contempt was as deep as their ideas were incompatible, should both revere Parmenides as a heroic oecist of the city of logos.
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the grandfather of their profession—though not always for the same reason. Historians of ancient philosophy and science similarly agree on the epochal importance of Parmenides’ contribution to Western thought but disagree on where, precisely, this importance lies. Some herald Parmenides for his primordial articulation of the notion of modality;\(^9\) others laud his groundbreaking advances in astronomy, especially his remarkable observation that the moon reflects the sun’s light (and, therefore, that the earth is spherical);\(^10\) others still foreground his seminal position in the atomic tradition.\(^11\) Whatever their differences, however, nearly all acknowledge that Parmenides is the first recorded person to make an extended deductive argument, and nearly all accept that his poem shares key features with what Aristotle will later call *apodeixis* or ‘demonstration’. As one of the 20th century’s leading historians of ancient thought put it, ‘the aims of *The Way of Truth* are clear: Parmenides sets out to establish a set of inescapable conclusions by strict deductive arguments from a starting point that itself has to be accepted. Those are features it shares with later demonstrations.’\(^12\)

Parmenides’ many other astonishing achievements do not, however, eclipse the fact that his confection of these three features—(i) proceeding from a starting point that has to be accepted (ii) by strict deductive arguments (iii) to establish an inescapable conclusion—marks a fundamental inflection point in the history of Western thought. The clarity with which we may state this is matched only by the intractable obscurity surrounding the development and fusion of these three features in Parmenides’ poem. This remains so despite agreement about Parmenides’ importance, and despite the quantity (and quality) of recent scholarship devoted to understanding Parmenides in relation to his

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\(^9\) See e.g. Palmer (2009).


\(^12\) Lloyd (2000) 244–45. See also Lloyd (1979) 67–79; Lloyd (1990) 81–86; and, more recently, and for an even more macroscopic perspective, Lloyd (2009) esp. 15–17; Lloyd (2017b) esp. 58–87; Lloyd (2018) esp. 39–56; and now Lloyd and Zhao (2018), for a comparison with ancient Chinese thought.
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Presocratic predecessors and successors. Exploring the origins of this complex of features (i–iii) and providing an account of their emergence, both as individual items and as a complex formed from them (viz. a ‘demonstration’), forms the central task of this book.

Two Enduring Problems: A Parmenidean Greek Miracle, and ‘Why Verse?’

There are good reasons for this intractability. The task of relocating Parmenides in his intellectual context is beset by deep, even potentially insurmountable challenges. The few ipsissima verba of Parmenides’ Milesian predecessors are embedded in settings, doxographical or otherwise, strongly marked by their pursuit of other, post-Parmenidean, agendas. Unless new original fragments appear, or a new understanding of the spread of people, information, and ideas can be persuasively established – or both – attempts to pin down the relationships between Parmenides and Xenophanes, or Anaximander, or Anaximenes (not to mention Heraclitus) will remain largely speculative (and may say more

13 Following the initial move by Barnes (1982), Curd (1998b) and Curd (2006), Osborne (2006), and Palmer (2009) re-examine Parmenides’ relationship to Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and the atomists. For predecessors and possible contemporaries, see nn. 15–17 below.


15 For a sophisticated treatment of ‘grand narrative’ approaches from Zeller (1892 and 1919) through Chemiss (1935) and Guthrie (1962), Guthrie (1965) to the surveys of Barnes (1982) and Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (2007), see Palmer (2009) 1–45, esp. 20–25; and also Graham (2006), Graham (2010), Graham (2013). The critique of Osborne (2006) remains trenchant. Much good work on Xenophanes has appeared in the last two decades, considerable portions of which have a bearing on his relationship to Parmenides; see esp. Lesher (1999); Lesher (2008); Lesher (2013); Mourelatos (2002); Mourelatos (2008a); Mourelatos (2008b) xxii–xxiii, xxii n. 14; Mourelatos (2013b); Mourelatos (2016a); Mogoródi (2006); Bryan (2012); also discussion in Curd (2011) 10–13, and now esp. Tor (2017).

16 See e.g. the deflationary comments of Cordero (2004) 8. Embers of the debate still smoulder: see e.g. Graham (2002a) and Nehamas (2002), followed up by Hermann (2009); Osborne (2006) 231–37 offers a different perspective on the controversy.

17 Not to mention possible relationships with Orphic and Pythagorean thought, and/or the myths and rituals of mystery cults; see n. 82 below.

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about our own conception of how ‘philosophy’ ought to work than anything else).18

Furthermore, our knowledge of the social, political, and intellectual dynamics of archaic poleis, especially in Magna Graecia, is too lacunose to identify with precision the influence of existing cultural, political, and legal institutions and practices on Parmenides.19 Vernant, responding to the connection between Hesiod and the Milesians posited by Comford, mocked Burnet’s notion of the ‘Greek Miracle’, as if “[a]ll of a sudden, on the soil of Ionia, logos presumably broke free from myth, as the scales fell from the blind man’s eyes. And the light of that reason, revealed once and for all, has never ceased to guide the progress of the human mind.”20 These words first appeared more than half a century ago, and in the interim an army of distinguished scholars has laboured to disassemble the Greek Miracle edifice block by block. Parmenides’ great foundation stone has escaped untouched, however: even now, we still have no detailed account that would explain just how Parmenides invented deductive argumentation, nor even one that links it to his predecessors’ modes of speaking and writing persuasively. Before Parmenides, Presocratics merely asserted;21 after him, they argued, and attempted to demonstrate.22 It is still as if, all of a sudden, on the soil of Elea, deductive argumentation and the practice of demonstration broke free from mere assertion, as the scales fell . . . In practice, the result is, as Malcolm Schofield put it, that ‘it is nowadays commonly supposed that Parmenides was a creative genius not much in debt to anybody’.23

19 To the extent that they elucidate larger sociopolitical trends with direct bearing on Parmenides’ context much more generally, classic studies such as Vlastos (1947), Vernant (2006b), Vernant (1982), Vernant (2006a), Vernant (2006f), Detienne (1996), Detienne (2007), Lloyd (1979), Lloyd (1987) help us grapple with the larger ‘Why?’ but do little to address the ‘How?’ of precise developments pertaining to Parmenides (see e.g. Lloyd (1990) 96). For relatively recent studies on law, see Gagarin (2002) and Asper (2005). We can now also add interest in archaic architectural practices: see e.g. Tzonis and Lefaivre (1999), Hahn (2001), and Giannisi (2006).
21 E.g. Curd (1998a) esp. 5–6; this point will be discussed extensively in Section 6.1, ‘Sēma I’ below.
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It is useful to juxtapose the scarcity of our knowledge of Parmenides’ social, cultural, and political setting with another quirk of the last century and a half of scholarship on Parmenides. While we often seem to be able to say too little about the tradition within, and out of, which Parmenides developed extended deductive argumentation and the skeleton of demonstration, scholars have ignored, and even lamented, aspects of his poem about which we might say much. They have registered with dismay Parmenides’ linguistic extravagance, finding it incongruous with the triumph of austere reasoning whose birth we are supposed to witness in the ‘Route to Truth’. How could Parmenides have elected to compose in verse? (Especially if, as the consensus since Diels and Wilamowitz – not to mention Plutarch – has it, that verse is so defective.) What could have motivated him to use such richly textured, imagistic language to formulate a deductive argument? Why did he deploy the narrative mechanics and ambiguity or polyvalence focus mostly, or exclusively, on the proem. Thankfully, times have begun to change. Robbiano (2006) makes use of Iser’s audience-oriented reception aesthetics (see esp. 22–34) to develop a more multifaceted account of Parmenides’ use of language and imagery, which are seen to work in service of transforming the audience itself. A recent entrant into the field, Ranzato (2015), drawing inspiration from Gernet’s notion of ‘the polyvalence of images’ as ‘a phenomenon of social memory’ (Gernet

24 See nn. 27–28, 79–81 below, for discussion of earlier treatments of Parmenides as poet. Fortunately, this book seems to be part of a groundswell of more culturally or poetically oriented assessments of Parmenides’ poetry, which, to my knowledge, have arisen independently of each other: see n. 28 below.

25 This attitude is no mere relic of the past; for a recent example, see Wedin (2014).


28 See Mourelatos (2008b) 222–63 for an early embrace of linguistic polyvalence in Parmenides – and, exceptionally even by later standards, not only in the proem. After a hiatus, one finds Coxon (2009) [1986], Couloubairitis (1990), Mansfeld (1995), Cerri (1999), Morgan (2000) 67–87, Miller (2006), Gemelli Marciano (2008) and Gemelli Marciano (2013), Palmer (2009), and Sassi (2018) – all of whose interests in linguistic ambiguity or polyvalence focus mostly, or exclusively, on the proem. Thankfully, times have begun to change. Robbiano (2006) makes use of Iser’s audience-oriented reception aesthetics (see esp. 22–34) to develop a more multifaceted account of Parmenides’ use of language and imagery, which are seen to work in service of transforming the audience itself. A recent entrant into the field, Ranzato (2015), drawing inspiration from Gernet’s notion of ‘the polyvalence of images’ as ‘a phenomenon of social memory’ (Gernet
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dramatic scenario of myth to stage reason’s great debut in Western thought?29

The impulses animating these questions are perhaps understandable. It will always be both tempting and, at least to some extent, unavoidable to read Parmenides backwards through the prism of the formalized second-order analysis of demonstration and deductive argumentation established by Aristotle. There is no obligation, however, to read Parmenides exclusively according to the rules of this canon, even though, in many of its essential features, it continues to define the way that we think and argue.30

In fact, it is precisely because the object of study here is in so many ways directly connected, and therefore immediately accessible, to our own intellectual practices, to what intuitively constitutes ‘good thinking’ today, that we must take special care. How are we to do this? The question gives an extra bite to Geoffrey Lloyd’s insistence on the value to historians of ancient thought of the anthropologist’s distinction between ‘actors’ categories’ and ‘observers’ categories’.31 As a basic methodological principle, anthropologists attempt ‘to express the ideas, beliefs, [and] practices of the society in question in the terms used by members of society themselves – the actors’.32 What is at stake in doing so?

(2004) 48, excerpted at length in Ranzato (2015) 16–17, uses ‘polyvalence’ as a sort of master term through which to approach Parmenides’ poem (see discussion at Section 4.3, ‘Concluding Remarks’, and notes 79, 80–82 in this chapter for more general differences between the respective fields, methods, and aims of our projects). Despite these differences, the present book operates in broad, if originally unwitting, allegiance with Ranzato’s work, along with a new generation of reassessments including Tor (2017), Ferella (2017) and Ferella (2018) (see note 76 below), and Mackenzie (2015), Mackenzie (2016), and Mackenzie (2017) (see note 79 below), in seeking to relocate Parmenides in his larger sociocultural, poetic, linguistic, religious, and physical context.

29 For welcome exceptions, see Most (1990a), Kahn (2001), Nightingale (2007) 190, Laks (2013), Sassi (2018), also Morgan (2000) 67–87, and the more recent works mentioned in n. 28 above. Much of the research cited in n. 82 below takes the opposite tack: emphasizing the mythical aspects of Parmenides’ poem, these scholars deny its status as a founddng document in the Western tradition of philosophical reasoning and argument – or that it contains arguments at all (in e.g. Gemelli Marciano (2008) and (2013); see n. 83 below for further discussion. As with many of the works cited in n. 28, these discussions nearly always focus on the proem (on this point, see n. 56 below).

30 Including, of course, the way that the author of a book such as this one is expected to argue, here and in what follows; see also remarks in Part III.


32 Lloyd (1992) 566.
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The aim of keeping as close as possible to the actors’ own categories is two-fold. Negatively, first, it helps to minimize the risks of assimilating alien ideas to our own, of assuming that the subjects studied have the same conceptual framework in mind that is suggested by the interpreter’s own (observer) categories. Positively, second, it allows an alien network of meanings to be built up in its own terms and be seen for what it is, as alien.33

Both factors should be carefully considered in the case of Parmenides. While reading his ‘Route to Truth’ as no more and no less than the earliest attested example of an extended deductive argument helps us pinpoint one of Parmenides’ most important contributions to the history of thought, paradoxically, doing so blocks us from examining just how he accomplishes the very act – inventing extended deductive argumentation and the outline of demonstration – that we would study.

This is true on several levels. First, to characterize Parmenides’ poem as a deductive argument is implicitly to bestow upon it from the start all the qualities we today understand a deductive argument to possess; suddenly fragments 2, 6, 7, and, especially, 8, as ‘deductive arguments’, are truth-preserving, and so proceed according to a specific kind of logical necessity anchored a priori in what we would call the laws of non-contradiction and the excluded middle.

Or at least they ought to. For, second, labelling the poem a deductive argument has the consequence of establishing a distinctive interpretive frame and corresponding set of hermeneutic expectations.34 Understanding it as a deductive argument first and last, one reads the poem against such criteria as validity and soundness, guards against such things as illicit modal upgrades35 or confusions of necessitas consequentiae and necessitas consequentii.36 discusses its language and structure in the philosopher’s idiom of quantification and predication,37 claims

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33 Lloyd (1992) 566.
34 Again, Barnes is exemplary: ‘Thus I shall . . . treat [Fr. 8] as an ordinary deduction’ (Barnes (1982) 177–78).
35 Hardy a relic of past attitudes: see e.g. discussion in the astute Palmer (2009), and the arguments of Lewis (2009) and Wedin (2014) for the enduring importance of the question of the ‘illicit modal upgrade’.
37 Little wonder that so much confusion surrounded Parmenides’ use of esti for so long – if one renders his argument in notation whose lexicon includes ‘∃’ and ‘φα’, one is not only trapped in the anachronism diagnosed by Brown (1994), one is perhaps blind to this very possibility, and thus also prevented in advance from transcending it.
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made de dicto and de re.\textsuperscript{38} Appropriate intertexts become the Discourse on Method\textsuperscript{39} or the Critique of Pure Reason,\textsuperscript{40} ‘On Denoting’\textsuperscript{41} or the Tractatus.\textsuperscript{42} This has consequences. Judged by rules unformed and standards yet unknown for hundreds or thousands of years, Parmenides is perpetually – but also, given his nonpareil innovation as a practising logician, inexplicably – on the verge of suffering amateurish lapses or committing schoolboy blunders.\textsuperscript{43}

Even more significantly for the present discussion, such a stance excludes from analysis – because by definition they should have no bearing on the deductive validity of the argument itself – the imagery that shapes, guides, and inflects the language and structure of Parmenides’ argument; the argument’s dramatic framing; its intertextual relations (except insofar as these intertexts are other deductive arguments); and its relationship to its sociocultural and historical context. In fact, such a hermeneutic stance not only

\textsuperscript{38} Barnes (1982) is not alone in succumbing to the urge to render Parmenides’ argument in formal logical notation; analysts as diverse as Wedin (2014) and Mourelatos (2008b) do the same.


\textsuperscript{40} ‘Burnet once said . . . that we must not (as Th. Gomperz did) interpret Parmenides as Kant before Kant . . . But this is exactly what we must do’ (Popper (1998e) 143–44); see also Mourelatos (2008b) xlii–xliv and Mourelatos (2013b).


\textsuperscript{42} Wittgenstein remains the most popular point of comparison in the anglophone world (though not only here – see also Janitzen (1976)); see, inter alia, Owen (1960) and Owen (1974) 275–76, Kahn (2009b), Williams (1981), the explicitly Wittgensteinian Mourelatos (2008b), M. Mackenzie (1982), Austin (1986) 15–16, and Wedin (2014). To this list we might also add Wilfred Sellars, a comparison detailed at length by Mourelatos (2008b) xlv–xlvi and Mourelatos (2013b); Spinoza, Berkeley, Meinong are also in the mix (see e.g. Mourelatos (2013a) 161–63). The phenomenon is not strictly limited to latter-day philosophers; one even finds comparisons to Stephen Hawking’s A Brief History of Time (Cerri (2000) 67–69), while Popper is happy to place Parmenides’ ideas alongside those of Boltzmann, Einstein, Gödel (see here also Wedin (2014)), and Schrödinger (Popper (1998a)).

\textsuperscript{43} See some of the discussions cited in nn. 37–38, esp. Barnes (1982) and Lewis (2009). In response, some would-be ‘defenders’ of Parmenides, such as Wedin (2014), must find ways to explain that Parmenides actually ‘got it right’. More subtly, this impulse can become a guiding interpretative assumption through a charitable desire to ‘make Parmenides’ arguments good’ (Sedley (1999), McKirahan (2008) 173, Palmer (2009) 63–105). This last remark is an observation, not a criticism; see Ch. 6, esp. n. 164, for further discussion.
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prevents these dimensions from being considered, but configures basic features of the text as problems. Why verse for a deductive argument? Why the dramatic encounter between kouros and goddess in a proof about the nature of what-is? Why so many images, such figurative language?

Similarly, referring to the poem as (simply) a deductive argument makes it hard to avoid retrojecting onto the poem’s earliest audiences a sense of the privileged status deductive argumentation today enjoys as the authoritative means by which to prove the validity of a claim. But why should a contemporary of Parmenides have found the sequence into which he ordered his claims compelling in and of itself?

Third, to approach the ‘Route to Truth’ from the presumption that one is reading a deductive argument is to accept as a fait accompli the very achievement one wishes to examine as the product of a complex process. The notion of a systematic argument of interlinked claims which begins from a necessary point of departure, proceeds from one claim to the next according to some kind of necessity, and ultimately arrives at a final destination, is all taken for granted of a demonstration (not least since these are among its defining features). But these are precisely the new elements that Parmenides introduces onto the discursive scene. To refer to Parmenides’ argumentative style as ‘deductive’ (and leave the matter there) is therefore to accept as a finished article that which we are in fact seeing fashioned before our eyes.

And this in turn, fourth, short-circuits from the start any attempt to examine the specific strategies and techniques by which Parmenides develops these new elements – precisely what we are interested in here. Calling this portion of his poem no less and no more than a deductive argument makes it seem as if this specific manner of advancing a claim (obviously and inherently superior, on this view, to its predecessors) had always been sitting around waiting to be discovered. To refer to Parmenides’

44 See nn. 26 and 27 above.
45 See nn. 28 and 29 above.
46 See e.g. Detienne (1996). The question is of course only as strange as, for example, the fact that the ancient Chinese felt little need to bother much with rigorous argumentation or proof; see Lloyd and Sivin (2002), Osborne (2006).
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fragments 2–8 as a ‘deductive argument’ or a ‘demonstration’, with no further elaboration, thus threatens *ipso facto* to prevent us from gaining fundamental insights into the process by which deductive argumentation emerges, the very techniques and strategies Parmenides used to make this manner of expressing claims about the nature of what-is seem plausible, or even intelligible.

The Two Problems Resolve Each Other

Against this backdrop, Lloyd’s remark concerning the benefits of allowing ‘an alien network of meanings to be built up’ could hardly be more salutary. It is true that ‘the terminology in which [Parmenides] describes what he is doing is a very limited one’ and that ‘[h]e has no word for deduction’.47 (Indeed, why would he?) But Parmenides *does* have language to describe the arguments that span fragments 2, 6, 7, and 8: and this centres on the programmatically repeated notion of what he calls a *hodos dizēsios* or ‘route of inquiry’.48 What is more, if this ‘terminology’ is indeed ‘limited’ insofar as it is not part of a larger system of technical vocabulary coined for special purposes, it is in other ways far richer, deeper, and of more subtle texture for precisely the same reason. These terms, not being ‘technical’, remain the more powerfully charged by the currents of polysemy, ambiguity, intertextuality, and the play of signifier and signified, for remaining enmeshed in the web of language.

Or, rather, network. For in light of Lloyd’s call to use actors’ categories (and not – or not only49 – our own), the gap (between Parmenides and his predecessors) and the excess (in Parmenides’ use of language and imagery) discussed above can be seen to form two sides of the very same Parmenidean coin. More: these two mysteries (where did Parmenides’ extended deductive argument

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47 See also Lloyd (1990) 81–84. One must be fair: the (important) point Lloyd makes concerns the importance of a well-developed technical vocabulary and other aspects of formalization, systematization, and other second-order activities.

48 Mourelatos (2008b) makes a strong case for this translation; for the semantics of the word *hodos*, which can mean, *inter alia*, ‘road’, ‘route’, ‘way’, or ‘journey’, see Folit-Weinberg (forthcoming, 2022) and Section 1.2 below.

49 It is ultimately, of course, the interplay between Parmenides’ terms and our own that will be of interest to us.