PARMENIDES DEMYTHOLOGISED

RODERIC A. GIRLE

Abstract

In this paper I argue that, given three popular modern doctrines which are combined in some accounts of modality, the outcome is equivalent to a suitably demythologised metaphysics of Parmenides. Prior has some anticipatory comment on the possible outcomes.[1]

1. *Introduction*

The impression is often given that the metaphysics of Parmenides is absurd. This impression is often reinforced with a warning that if philosophers resort to an "extreme" view then they are bound to finish with an absurd view, "like Parmenides." But all this is far too swift. I will argue that there is a way of looking at Parmenides which brings his views very much into line with the views of a substantial number of modern philosophers who are not taken to be putting forward absurd views. They might be somewhat discomforted to be grouped with Parmenides, but if they are, then that in itself should give cause to pause and consider both the issue of Parmenides' alleged absurdity and to what extent they have inherited Parmenides' problems.

So let us first reprise the views of Parmenides. Then we consider some modern doctrines which have consequences of a quite Parmenidean kind. This will lead us to considering a contrast in the Philosophy of Time of considerable interest to Prior.

2. *Parmenides and the Sphere*

Parmenides wrote that reality was

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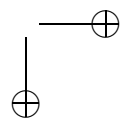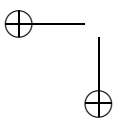
> homogeneous, uniform, motionless within the limits of mighty
> bonds, without beginning or end, without coming into being and
> without going out of being, of necessity both immovable and com-
> plete. Reality is like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere, equally
> balanced in every direction.[2]

In summary, reality is an unchanging timeless "plenum"[3].

In the next section we look at Parmenides' general approach to meta-
physics, and then at his specific doctrines. We distinguish four main doc-
trines by demythologising Parmenides' metaphysics, or in other words, trans-
forming his metaphysics into the terminology and doctrine of modern philos-
ophy while retaining its essential features. Our focus is then on the finitistic
doctrine of his metaphysics. This doctrine, we argue, could be removed or
replaced by a modern infinitistic doctrine without negating the closely re-
lated doctrine of completeness. This leaves us with an even shorter list of
three features. The contrast between the lists is discussed, as are the features
listed.

In the second section, we focus on the three modern doctrines which deter-
mine a particular modern metaphysics. They are the doctrines of existential
import, of trans-temporal realism, and of possible worlds modality. The lat-
ter two, especially, are of concern to Prior. These three, when put together
in a consistent manner, give us a static reality metaphysics.

In the fourth section we argue that the demythologised Parmenidian re-
ality and the modern static reality are essentially the same, and have the
same difficult issues to deal with. One of the issues is the problem of anti-
psychologistic personhood.

3. *Demythologising Parmenides*

The general positive approach of Parmenides is to declare what is true about
what is. He writes that:

> the only ways of enquiry that are thinkable are either by the way
> of true persuasion that there is something but not nothing, or by the

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[2] Unless it is stated otherwise, I rely on the text and translation in Kirk, G.S. and J.E.
Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969 reprint
(K&R). I have, however, used 'homogeneous' rather than K&R's 'continuous', to avoid con-
fusion with the mathematical sense of 'continuous'.

[3] The term was used in contrast with "vacuum", a contrast being drawn between matter
and emptiness, or being and the void.

way I declare to be unthinkable that, of necessity, there is (some) nothing. But, you cannot know nor say, for it's impossible, that there is nothing, because only what *there is* can be thought about. (my translation)[4]

Parmenides is setting the scene for the view that there is no non-being. His claims about what is true of reality involves assertion of only the "positive" characteristics of what exists (εστι). This view gives a methodology of discussion and has been recently set out as *Parmenides' Principle*:

> *Things which do not exist cannot be referred to or mentioned; no statement can be about them.*[5]

Parmenides may not want to even mention the non-existent or non-being, but his methodological discourse does just that, and he is therefore expressing true ideas concerning what cannot be thought about. But it is not this paradoxical question that I want to address. We must leave that for another time. We will return later, though, to Parmenides' Principle. At this point I want to look at what Parmenides asserts positively and, on his account, truly about the existent.

We look at four things in Parmenides. First the contrast between truth and wrongheaded opinion, which can easily be demythologised to a modern perspective, but it is not important so to do and we just note it. Second we discuss the positive features of reality, especially completeness which is of major importance. Third the contrast between finite and infinite which can be demythologised into something quite neutral. Fourth the contrast between uniformity and distinctions.

3.1. *Truth and Opinion*

There is the contrast between the truth about reality and wrongheaded opinion. Parmenides distinguished sharply between the truth about reality and our beliefs about reality, especially our wrongheaded beliefs. Parmenides said, after giving an account of reality, that "Here I end my trustworthy discourse and thought concerning truth; henceforth learn the beliefs of mortal

[4] In view of the poetic nature of Parmenides' writing, I have not made a highly literal translation but have tried to capture the poetically expressed ideas with the use of modern philosophical catch phrases, especially, "Why is there something and not nothing?"

[5] Fitting and Mendelsohn, *First-order Modal Logic* (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1998) page 172. (F&M)

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men by listening to the deceitful ordering of my words." He shifts across
from truth to wrongheaded opinion, and gives his account of why mortals
believe all sorts of disordered opinion.

Although for Parmenides this is the distinction between truth and belief,
this distinction can be seen as the distinction between how things *are* and
how things *seem* to be. Simplicius described this as the shift from the ob-
jects of reason to the objects of sense. A modern philosopher might say
that it is the distinction between reality and appearance. But nothing dra-
matic hangs on taking Parmenides literally. In fact, for the purposes of this
paper, we need not enter into the ongoing complex debate about whether
Parmenides' account of wrongheaded beliefs is an account of Pythagorean
doctrines, popular opinion, or just some eccentric invention of Parmenides
himself.

3.2. *Features of Reality*

Our interest is in Parmenides' account of the truth about the features of re-
ality. When we look at Parmenides' poem, part of which was quoted at the
beginning of this paper, we see that Parmenides is proclaiming that reality
has eight features. Reality is:

(1) homogeneous
(2) uniform
(3) motionless
(4) finite
(5) without beginning, generation or birth
(6) without ending, demise or destruction
(7) immoveable
(8) complete (entire)[6]

The Greek terminology suggests that these can be conveniently reduced
to four. We can see that the Greek terms for "homogeneous" and "uniform"
above emphasise "likeness" and "not being able to be separated or cut up."
They transform easily to "homogeneous uniformity." The terms used for
"motionless" and "immoveable" above emphasise the lack of both internal
and external motion of the plenum. They can be simply paired. The terms for
"without beginning or generation" and "without end or destruction" above
become "without beginning or ending." The terms used for "finite" and

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[6] These are to be found in K&R in the footnote translations on pages 273 to 277. cf.
Coxon, A.H. *The Fragments of Parmenides*, (Van Gorcum, Maastricht, 1986) pages 59–75
and commentary.
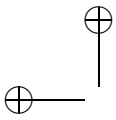
"complete" emphasise the finite entirety of reality. We discuss the pairing of finite and complete below. These groupings are quite natural for modern philosophers and give us the four features below in list (A):

(A)   (1) homogeneous and uniform
         (2) motionless and immoveable
         (3) without beginning or ending
         (4) finite and complete

This list is our partly demythologised list of Parmenidean features of reality. But we need to go further and discuss the third and fourth features of Parmenides' (A).

3.3. *Finite and Infinite*

To our modern view, the third and fourth features seem to be at least contrary. But now, as a result of popular presentations of Relativity Theory, we tend to put time and space together in some sort of four dimensional spatio-temporal whole, whereas Parmenides would almost certainly have seen them as quite distinct. So the third feature is temporal, and the fourth is spatial in a special sense. Reality is spatially finite and complete, but temporally neither ending nor beginning.

According to W.T. Jones[7] Parmenides argued in the following way:

> Starting from the basic premise of monism, that reality is fundamentally one, and adding two additional premises ... first, "What is, is" and second, "What is not is not." ... it seemed to follow that whatever is, is (1) uncreated, (2) indestructible, (3) eternal, and (4) unchangeable.
> (pages 21–22)

The most interesting thing about the list in Jones is that he has already been engaged in some demythologising of Parmenides. Jones has no mention of the finite and complete nature of reality. It is this finitude which leads Parmenides to say that reality is *like a well-rounded sphere*, that is, like a limited geometrical object.

Parmenides emphasises the contrast between finite and infinite. There was a fairly typical Greek view that a lack of limits, like the kind embraced by modern accounts of infinity, was unrealistic. If there is no limit then there is

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[7] Jones, W.T. *A History of Western Philosophy, Volume One, The Classical Mind*, 2nd Edition, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1970).
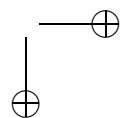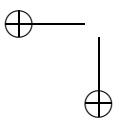
incompleteness or lack of entirety; and anything incomplete or not entire is unreal. This is almost certainly why Aristotle saw the finite as real and the infinite as an unactualised possible.

Reality, especially spatial reality, could not be infinite. It had to be limited in some sort of "closed" sense. Parmenides says, effectively, that "there is a furthest limit." So we have Parmenides' image of reality being "*like* the bulk of a well-rounded sphere" (my italics). A finite sphere is a *closed* space with a *definite limit*. There is an interesting claim in Einstein's early theory of relativity that the universe is finite but unbounded. This might have been met with considerable puzzlement by Parmenides, but is paradoxically somewhat like his view of a finite entirety.

The question we must answer is, "Is Parmenides' view that reality has a finite spatial limit inextricably bound up with the rest of his metaphysical doctrines?" I do not think so. And in any case there are consequences of an interesting kind, if we allow that the finitistic Parmenides can be made infinitistic or relativistic in some way, and yet retain the view that reality is complete and entire. In this paper I wish to emphasise the completeness or entirety of reality in Parmenides, whatever is to be said about the finite or the infinite dimensions of space.

It needs to be noted that the finite is linked to the complete in Parmenides. The real target is completeness. A complete reality is one which is in want of no change. So, even if we allow for the transformation of finite to infinite, the completeness of the (new) infinite reality should stand. Coxon has Parmenides saying, "it is not lawful the Being should be incomplete, for it is not defective,"[8] and Taran has it as "it is not right for being to be incomplete, for it is not in need."[9]

Allowing the demythologisation from finite to infinite, but holding to completeness, will give us the following four features of the Parmenidean world in our second list (B):

(B)   (1) homogeneous and uniform
         (2) motionless and immoveable
         (3) without beginning or ending
         (4) complete

These do not match Jones's account, especially as far as time goes. Jones reads "without beginning or ending" as "eternal". We return to the question of time later.

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[8] Op. cit. page 70.

[9] Taran, L. *Parmenides* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1965) page 86.

3.4. *To Change or Not to Change*

There was, in much of Greek thinking, and there is in some modern thought as well, the view that change could not be part of basic reality. The basic reality of the world has to be something utterly unchanging. The 'really' real would have to be fixed in its essential nature. This view was at first expressed in the semi-physical or semi-scientific postulations of the pre-Socratics that the world was just fire, or just water, or just atomic bits in the void. The fire would always be fire, however that manifested itself. The water will always be water, however it manifests itself. The atoms were, as the word itself says, not divisible. Nor is any one of them subject to change. Change becomes more or less problematic, depending on the basic constituents of reality.

For example, consider a very brief account of what the atomists had to say. At first sight, the atomist solution to the problems of change is by far the most modern of the solutions. Individual atoms change not. They persist. Each is distinct. Change arises by the rearrangement of atoms in the void. The atomists' main problem was their account of the void. They said that it existed but it was non-being. If we take the view that to say that the void is non-being, and that non-being is non-existence, then the atomists are contradicting themselves. That is their problem.

Now for time. It is important not to be too quick to accept the idea that the fourth characteristic of reality:
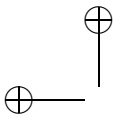
(4) without beginning or ending

entails eternity. Parmenides states of reality that:

it *was* not in the past, nor *shall* it be, since it *is* now, all at once, one, homogeneous.
(K & R, page 273)

This is closely related to Parmenides' completeness, reality is *completely now* or *entirely now*. This gives us a picture of a timeless present. It is interesting to note that there is a temporal logic for linear time which can be interpreted in terms of now and only now. This might seem to be paradoxical, but temporal logic can be tricky.

Think of it this way. The ordinary modern way of looking at time is very geometrical. We think of time as a line from past to future through the present — a kind of arrow pointing into the future. Let us say that any instant along the line is in an "after" relationship to the instants in its past, and a "before" relationship to the instants in its future. Temporal logic gives

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this line some pretty obvious properties in terms of the instants. The "after" and "before" relations are transitive: *If t_n is before(after) t_k, and t_k is before(after) t_j, then t_n is before(after) t_j.* Other relations such as connectedness[10] are introduced to ensure that there is a single line of instants, not a branching tree of instants, and this gives linear time. Strange as it might seem, the minimum requirements for linear time do not in the end give us a time which must extend off from the present into an infinite past and an infinite future. It has been discovered that it is not easy to formalise the notion that time does not loop so that the future "connects" to the past in a great circle of time. One of the simplest minimal formal models for linear time is Scott's[11] non-beginning, non-ending time. This logic would seem at first to rule out any looping of time. But Smiley gives an interpretation for Scott's logic which is a model of a single instant in a loop. There is no beginning or ending. But the one instant is in a loop such that it is both after and before itself.

The Smiley interpretation was described by Prior as "instantaneous time".[12] Malcolm Rennie[13] reports that Prior once called this "Parmenidean time." It is static time, Parmenedian time with no past and no future, the only time being the static present.

We can demythologise even further to get the following four features of a Parmenidean world by transposing "without beginning and ending" to "timelessly instantaneous." We have now arrived at a third list (C):

(C)　　　(1)　homogeneous and uniform
　　　　　(2)　motionless and immoveable
　　　　　(3)　timelessly instantaneous
　　　　　(4)　complete

The Parmenidean solution to the problem of change and persistence through change is to assert that the truth of the matter is that there is no change, no motion, no past and no future, just a simple static now.

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[10] "before" is a connected relation iff for any two distinct instants, t' and t'', either t' is before t'' or t'' is before t'.

[11] See Girle, Rod. *Modal Logics and Philosophy* (Acumen, Teddington, 2000) Chapter 8 pages 131–132.

[12] Prior, A.N. Past Present and Future, (Oxford, Clarendon, 1967) page 49.

[13] Rennie, M.K. *Notes on Tense Logic* (University of Queensland Philosophy Department teaching resources, 1972).
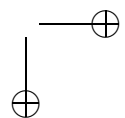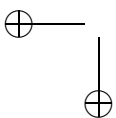
3.5. *Homogeneous Uniformity*

There is no non-being. Parmenides took the view that what exists is homogeneous, so that although he does not say there is no void in reality, the homogeneous uniformity of what exists is contrary to there being any void. His assertion of the "positive" characteristics of what exists (εστι) is highly consistent with his methodological view.

Parmenides' notion that reality is homogeneous may be the result of a logical mistake, a failure to distinguish between identity and predication. Many commentators see such a logical mistake in Parmenides' account of his methodology. But I take a different view that, if there is a mistake, it is to be found in his account of why reality is homogeneous.

What then is Parmenides' notion of uniformity and homogeneity? He writes:

> Nor is [reality] divisible, since it is all alike; nor is there more here
> and less there, which would prevent it from cleaving together, but it
> is all full of what is. So it is all homogeneous;

It goes like this. If the contents of reality vary from part to part of the whole then what is in one part *is not* what is in any other. So what is in one part *does not exist* in some other part. And this would apply to all parts of reality. We would have to admit that there was non-existence in every part — and that will make us depart from truth. So, Parmenides makes the claim that reality is homogeneous and uniform.

How are we to see this in modern terms? There are two not mutually exclusive options. First there is the attribution of existence to properties. Second there is the notion that reality is, just as Parmenides concludes, utterly uniform. We return to this feature of Parmenides' metaphysics later in the paper.

In the meantime, do we eliminate homogeneity as part of demythologising Parmenides? If we did then we would be correcting, rather than removing local bias and local assumption in the Parmenidean context. But let us see what follows if we do remove homogeneity. Then we have the view that reality has the three features from our third list to give (D):

(D)   (1) motionless and immoveable
        (2) timelessly instantaneous
        (3) complete

We turn now to the modern doctrines.

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4. *Modern Resonance*

There are three modern doctrines which we now turn to. First there is the assumption of existential import for names and quantifiers, second is the tenseless account of time, and third is modal realism.

We begin with the doctrine of existential import. This doctrine claims that only existent entities can be referred to or quantified over. Words which we tend to think of as names of planets, mythical beasts and fictional characters, such as "Vulcan", "Pegasus" and "Pickwick" are not really names at all. And if we say that all planets have orbits around the Sun, then the quantifier, "All", does not include Vulcan in its range, because only existent entities can be quantified over. These pseudo-names need to be eliminated in favour of some complex description. This doctrine has been cited in recent work on First-order Modal Logic as a doctrine based on Parmenides' Principle, quoted above.

The doctrine poses enormous problems for quantified modal logic. Existential import rules out talk about or the naming of entities which *might* exist, or which are *possible* existents. For example, existential import makes it very difficult to understand what was being talked about when astronomers talked about the planet Vulcan, which was once thought to be between Mercury and the Sun. Vulcan does not exist, and one is not supposed to be able either to name or talk about non-existent entities in the direct way in which we do in everyday language.[14]

One would think that in modal logic one could have the actual world in which Vulcan does not exist and some possible world in which Vulcan does exist. But, if one says that there is a possible world in which the solar system contains Vulcan, then the same problem arises because we cannot talk about possible worlds which contain objects not existing in the actual world where we speak. The only kind of possibilities allowed are those which deal with the re-arrangement of things in or from the actual world. But there is a solution within the bounds of Parmenides' Principle. It is modal realism.

The modal realism of philosophers such as David Lewis[15] claims that possible worlds are as real as the actual world in which we find ourselves. Things which exist "out there" in possible worlds are entities in an all encompassing domain of existing things. Although one might be tempted to say that the all encompassing domain is really a domain of possible existents,

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[14] So tough is this doctrine that, from a formal point of view, if we let "v" be the name of Vulcan, and think that $(\exists x)(x = v)$ says that Vulcan exists, we discover that $\sim(\exists x)(x = v)$, which might be thought to say that Vulcan does not exist, is a logical contradiction. $(\exists x)(x = v)$ is a logical truth. Anything named must exist.

[15] Lewis, D.K. *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1986).

a *possibilist* domain, that is not strong enough. The entities must "really exist" in an overall *actualist* domain.[16]

In fact, Lewis's modal realism can be seen as flowing from a full-blooded doctrine of existential import. Lewis, together with most modal logicians and metaphysicians, gives an account of possibility and necessity purely in terms of quantifying over possible worlds. A statement of possibility is true in our world if in at least one possible world what's claimed to be possible is true, simpliciter. A statement of necessity is true if what's claimed to be necessarily true is true in all possible worlds. So, if it's possible for rabbits to be carnivorous, then there is a world in which rabbits are carnivorous. If "It's necessary that: if it rains then it rains," then in every possible world it's the case that "If it rains then it rains." But *if* we cannot quantify over things which do not exist, then either the possible worlds account fails or each possible world exists in a full-blooded, quantifiable-over way. "Every possible world" ranges over existing worlds only. So we have the third doctrine, the doctrine of modal realism.

Modal logic has been interpreted as the logic of time. The possible worlds become time-slices of the world, or instants in the world's history. It is usual to have a modality for the future and one for the past. Consider past modality. *It's possible that* p becomes *At sometime past: p*. ($\Diamond p$ becomes $\text{P}p$) Say we wanted to assert that Socrates lived in Athens. If we accept the doctrine of existential import, and agree that Socrates no longer exists, then we have problems. Once Socrates ceased to exist his name ceased to be a name. But if we accept a doctrine analogous to modal realism for all possible instants of time and agree that all time slices or historical instants in the past are just as real as the now, then the problem vanishes. The same is then applied to the future as well, and we have all time existent, just as real as now. This is the tenseless account of time.

Time is not to be seen as a context for the Universe, a background against which events occur, and in terms of which entities endure. Time is one dimension of a four dimensional whole. The tenseless account of time is essentially an account in which our planet is a four dimensional worm in a reality of at least three dimensions of space and a fourth dimension of time. Each of us is likewise a four-dimensional worm through time. The notion that you and I and the planets and the Sun and the galaxies are spatio-temporal worms, is parasitic on the notion that the Universe as a whole is a four-dimensional worm, the uni-worm. There is no fallacy of composition here, no fallacy of division. Time, as such, is from one extremity of the uni-worm to the other, and is merely an internal dimension of the uni-worm, an

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[16] See F&M.
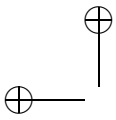
internal dimension of the existent. And the uni-worm exists in total. The *total* is changeless. It has no past, it has no future, it just *is*.

In Lewis's modal realism there is an explicit advocacy of the tenseless account of time. Each possible world is a four dimensional, infinitely large whole, a complete uni-worm. The complication is that there are many uni-worms, for that is what each possible world is. There is also an explicit advocacy of existential import. The actual world is just the existing uni-worm in which we live, and move (not), and have our being. The other possible extended temporal worlds also exist. Reality has to encompass not just one uni-worm, but infinitely many uni-worms.

The uni-worm satisfies the (D) list of Parmenidian features of being: motionless and immoveable, timelessly instantaneous, and complete. The tenseless uni-worm is a complete Parmenidean plenum.

4.1. *Alternative Accounts*

Of course, the doctrines of existential import and trans-temporal reality are not the only solutions to the issues discussed above. If one takes a possibilist approach to naming and quantification and possible worlds, then one can distinguish between the actual world at any present instant and the other possible and temporal worlds in terms of what is actual, in terms of what actually exists. Fitting and Mendelsohn give a formal account of this alternative approach and introduce an explicit predicate for existence to sharpen up their account.

Prior anticipated just such a modal realism and suggested that it was unlikely that anyone would advocate such a metaphysics.
Prior wrote:

> I wonder whether anybody wants to put forward anything like the following as a piece of serious metaphysics: There really are such objects as possible worlds, and what we loosely describe as propositions of modal logic are in fact predicates of which these objects are the subjects.[17]

He saw such a metaphysics as being analogous to a tenseless account of time and "a tall story". He rashly assumed that no one would take up such a metaphysical stance, and that by virtue of the analogy he could show the tenseless account of time to be also "a tall story." This approach to time has been partly a consequence of the four dimensional approach to time in relativity theory,

[17] Prior, A.N. "Modal Logic and the Logic of Applicability" *Theoria* Vol. 34, 1968, pages 183–202.
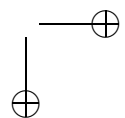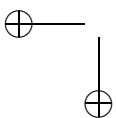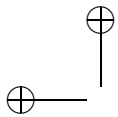
but it has also been influenced by questions about propositional evaluation in time. Some have insisted that propositions need to be temporally indexed if they are to be given truth value. They have to be "placed" in the temporal dimension in order to be evaluable. Without indexing, a proposition is incomplete. The mere assertion is not enough.

In Prior's response to this view of propositions he insists that propositions, upon being asserted, are the bearers of truth value. According to him, when I say that I am drinking, then the assertion gives us a complete proposition, a present assertion. The past and future will be relevant only in so much as I make a statement such as "I was drinking." When I say that I am drinking there is no need to say that I "am" truly and forever drinking at a particular time on a day in a year in a uni-worm. That I assert that I am drinking is sufficient. Later I might say that I *was* drinking, and that asserts a proposition also, but about my drinking in the past of when the assertion was made. This is in contrast to those who insist that for a proposition to be the bearer of truth value it must be temporally indexed to show just where in the uni-worm it is to be evaluated. Without temporal uni-worm indexing the assertion is not complete. Lack of indexing means that it is not sufficient for the evaluation of what is asserted. What is needed, it is claimed, is complete indexed temporality.

Prior does acknowledge that there are "fewer knock-down arguments against [the tenseless account of time] — or for that matter against the taller story about modality — than I once thought;" and goes on to say, "In doing metaphysics there is still no substitute for 'the choice of the soul'; or if you like, prejudice."[18]

5. *Multiplicity and Uniformity*

This is where we have to know whether or not the multiplicity of existing worlds is compatible with Parmenides' view. Before leaping too far we need to look back and see that as we progressively demythologised Parmenides we shifted at the last from (C) to (D). The difference between these two demythologised accounts is that the (C) list contains the feature that reality is homogeneous and uniform, but this is not in the (D) list. Modal realism is, in the sense of list (D), quite Parmenidean. What then of (C)?

In Lewis's account of modal realism it turns out that each world is quite distinct from every other. So, across all possible worlds, there is difference. They are not continuous with each other, and they do not constitute a uniform whole, indeed, they do not constitute a singular homogeneous uniform

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[18] Op. cit. page 192.

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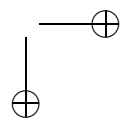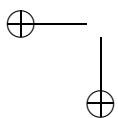
whole. In the sense of the (C) list, Lewis's modal realism is not quite Parmenidean. The multiplicity of distinct worlds runs against the singularity and completeness of the (C) list. There can be one and only one world, then there are no possibilities or necessities of the existent possible worlds kind in the Parmenidean reality.

In this sort of discussion there is always a "but, if." But, if worlds are all Parmenidean and there is but one, then the modality of possibility and necessity becomes part of our wrongheaded opinions about the world, part of our belief state. And those states are then best understood in terms of kinds of belief states. And, as it turns out, the more important parts of Lewis's formal accounts of modality, such as his account of counterfactuals, are equivalent to belief revision accounts of counterfactuals. Modal realism does not survive in the (C) list, but modality does survive as wrongheaded belief.

Let us look at this a little more, the (C) list notion is that modality is wrongheaded belief, and that there is but one world. The features of that world are that it is motionless and immoveable, complete, and timelessly instantaneous. Can we really grasp what this asserts? The question is, "What is it *like* to be a motionless and immoveable, complete, and timelessly instantaneous world?"

6. *What is it like to be a Parmenidean world*

The mathematics of four dimensional geometry is at a level of abstraction that makes it difficult to form a sensible impression of what the immoveable, complete, and timelessly instantaneous world is like. In his work of fiction, *The Memory of Whiteness*, Kim Stanley Robinson[19] gives us a strikingly concrete picture of what such a universe is like in full for a perceiving agent. And when we get that account of how the experience would be, the world turns out to be not only motionless and immoveable, complete, and timelessly instantaneous, but also homogeneous and uniform.

Robinson sets the scene and gives a kind of God's eye view of the (C) list world. Part of what is written is given here. The far future hero, Johannes, is on an asteroid sealed inside an airtight bubble, and is being shown the 'real' Parmenidean universe:
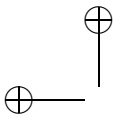
> the deep blue drained out of the sky. Black night, and the network of stars above. ... The little asteroid beneath them was white and green on its sunward side. Then, as Johannes watched, it pulsed, it

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[19] Robinson, K.S. *The Memory of Whiteness* (Tor, London, 1986). It was the reading of this book which set me off to write this paper.

stretched out, the crescent of white-green became a band extending across space. And everything blurred, everything fell away. The stars were streaks. There were more of them than he had ever seen. Nearby was what he took to be the sun, Sol, now a bar of light crossing the black space from end to end; and space was filled with other bars of light, each stretching as far as he could see. Looking harder at his solar system Johannes saw the planet-streaks spiraling around the white bar of light, some tight and close, others distant and spiraling more loosely. The gas giants were surrounded by faint helixes of their own.

And now the line of the sun curved very clearly, crossing other curved lines. So many stars that the space here was more white lines than black space. ... Black space filled with white curved lines, crowded by them —

... Other galaxies stretched across the black of space, some close, some far. White threads, scattered randomly. But no. Everything has its causes, and necessarily "becomes" next because it has always been that way: and all of the galaxy threads curved out away from, and came back to, a small white ball far below him. The threads burst away from the white ball in every direction, so that the ball's true size was impossible to see; the threads extended outward, curved back toward the central ball, returned to it. At their maximum reach outward they bowed in graceful arcs, and all of them together made a pattern; the curving white lines appeared somewhat like the outlines of the edges of flower petals. A big spherical black flower, its petals outlined in white, its center a bright white knob. The universe. ... The universe looked like an infinitely petaled chrysanthemum. Spherical white bloom there on its velvet black field, eternally pulsing in and out. ... there were more spherical tracery blooms, scattered around him. It was as if he stood on a rolling black hillside covered by white chrysanthemums. A hillside of flower universes, all fixed forever, all recurring eternally, unchanging; ... And there above him — a black sky filled with white chrysanthemums. As his vision gained power the white blooms covered the black hillside, filled the black sky, sparked in every patch of darkness; in the endless expanse of infinity every possible universe existed eternally, filling all Non-Being with Being. And he looked up into a sky that was pure white. And the hillside below him was pure white. And around him all was white, pure white, pure white. (pps. 201–203)

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This is what the full Parmenidean universe is *like*. The universe becomes a "porridge of light, of energy."[20] "Just a moment," you might say, "this is poetic license. We can draw no such conclusion by strict argument." To this it might be responded that the poetic license is that with which we began in the poem of Parmenides.

7. *Conclusion*

What can be our response to this presentation of what the Parmenidean reality is like other than the response above? What can we say that is in the spirit of Robinson's "picture"? It can be the response of the believer in terms of their phenomenal consciousness, the response of Johannes' friend in whose mouth Robinson puts the words:

> "if the true reality is a timeless whole, determined forever, then *where does the illusion of succession come from?* Why should our consciousness be moving forward into the future, when everything else in the universe is static and complete? It's absurd!"
> (page 340)

The absurdity is that the perception of change, the illusion of succession, runs contrary to the fixedness of the plenum. It removes the human experience of discontinuity, motion, possibility, and the flow of time from the plenum into the void, and renders us as we know ourselves non-existent. This, in Prior's terms, is contrary to the prejudice of the soul.

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[20] The "porridge" expression was suggested at the annual conference of the *Australasian Association of Philosophy* in Adelaide in 2004. I cannot remember exactly who coined the phrase, but it is not originally mine. It does seem apt.