

Between truth, knowledge and belief

Πίστις in early Greek philosophy

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Post-truth and ... pre-truth?

Although the first usage of the term *post-truth* was in 1992, it still had some time to go until widespread usage: Oxford Dictionary named it as the official 2016 word of the year, because of a 20-times increase in usage since 2015. Although the ongoing secularization of the Western world would seem to entail a growing confidence in empirical facts, The Brexit referendum in June of 2016 and the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States of America in November and similar populist movements in other countries would seem to suggest otherwise. Following Trump's election, the appeal to "alternative facts" (by Kellyanne Conway) and repeated calls to reputable news sources as "fake news" (by Trump himself) further popularized this word in early 2017.

This questioning of facts recalls early Greek philosophy, where there was much speculation about the possibility of knowledge and its possible objects, and the status of belief in these epistemological systems. Iribarren, in a 2006 article, discussed the rationalisation of belief in Parmenides and Empedocles, focussing on the use of the Greek term πίστις as a philosopheme. The present study aims to uncover the development of the word in the longer term, including both Gorgias and Plato and a corpus study of the non-philosophical use of this word in order to have a more precise view of the semantics of the term.

1 Πίστις in linguistics

Our Greek word πίστις is a *-tis*-derivative from the Greek verb πείθομαι "to obey, to be convinced" (the active πείθω "to convince" is secondary). It in turn comes from the Proto-Indo-European root **b^heid^h-*, with as most direct descendants the Latin verb *fidere* "to trust" < **b^heid^h-e-* and the nouns *fidēs* "guarantee, trust" < **b^hid^h-ē* and *foedus* "treaty, agreement" < **b^hoid^h-es*. In Albanian we also have a noun meaning "trust", namely *bē* < **b^hoid^h-ā*. We also find cognates in Germanic going back to Proto-Germanic **baidjan* "to force, demand", a causative formation, and **bīdan* "to wait" (cf. Kroonen, 2013), to this first group belong e.g. Gothic *baidjan* "to force" and Old Norse *beiða* "to ask" and to the second e.g. Gothic *beidan* "to await, to look for" and Old Norse *bíða* "to wait for". The distribution of meanings here is complicated, however. According to Kroonen (2013) the original meaning of this verb was closer to Germanic **baidjan*, i.e. "to force", whereas he sees the Greek and Latin meanings to have "evolved in medio-passive use", which for Greek of course is true, and perhaps the fact that the active in Greek is secondary is also an argument for this view.

Benveniste (1969) devotes a chapter of his book on the vocabulary of Indo-European institutions to what he calls *la fidélité personnelle*, in which he also treats the meaning of this word, taking Latin *fides* as the basis for his analysis. As he shows, although *fides* is traditionally translated with "trust" or "belief", this meaning cannot be the original one. If it were, it would give expressions occurring in Plautus such as *mihi est fides apud te* exactly the opposite meaning: we would expect this to translate as "I have faith in you" but in fact it means "You have faith in me". Clearly any meaning of the type "trust/faith/belief" is out of place here. Originally then, *fides* must be something that can be deposited with someone else. This is also shown by use of the term pertaining to the gods, where we find e.g. *di, obsecro vestram fidem* "Gods, I ask in supplication for your *fides*". Clearly, it is not the case that the suppliant asks the Gods to have faith in *him*; rather it is the suppliant who asks from the gods something to warrant his faith, a sort of guarantee to rely on in times of distress (Benveniste, 1969, p. 117).

1.1 Greek Πίστις in general usage

Interestingly, although the standard translations of πίστις is usually also that of “persuasion, trust, belief”¹, a small corpus research² suggests that probably the oldest and most common meaning of this word, again, is not “belief” but in fact “proof, guarantee, pledge”.

In Homer, the term πίστις does not occur. The corresponding adjective πιστός is used however, occurring in two rather narrowly determined constructions: either there is talk of ὄρκια πιστά “trusted oaths” (exclusively used in plural) or of a πιστὸς ἑταῖρος “trusted friend”. Although any meaning admitted for this of course needs not be directly translatable to the related term πίστις, these two particular occurrences are striking nonetheless. For both of these terms, the standard translation of πιστός, “faithful, loyal, trusted” seems tautological: an oath that is not trustworthy or not trusted is no oath at all, and the same goes for a friend.

In Hesiod, there is only one occurrence of πίστις, in a line which is disputed no less. The manuscripts read as follows:

μισθὸς δ' ἀνδρὶ φίλῳ εἰρημένος ἄρκιος ἔστω·
καί τε κασιγνήτῳ γελάσας ἐπὶ μάρτυρα θέσθαι·
πίστεις δ' ἀρ' ὁμῶς καὶ ἀπιστίαι ὤλεσαν ἄνδρας. (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 369–372)
“Let the promised wage for a friendly man be fixed;
and get a witness, even when smiling at your brother;
for πίστεις and ἀπιστίαι alike have ruined men.”³

Both words, πίστις and its counterpart ἀπιστία are not found in Homer. The form πίστεις as nominative plural is inappropriate for early epic, as Verdenius (1985) points out, for this reason preferring to read a nominative singular here. As West (1978, p. 250) points out there are some parallels for this form, namely in Il. 12.258 ἐπάλξεις, 23.891 δυνάμει, although Verdenius did not think them very convincing. The meter is also problematic, as the second foot lacks its starting long syllable. West had previously suggested a reading δὴ ἄρ, but he retracted this (1978, p. 250) and offers no alternative. Nevertheless, the plural may be preferred here, because of the fact that we have a plural in ἀπιστίαι, which very strongly suggests the plural πίστεις as well, as these exact opposites occur more often in Hesiod and a difference in number would be very unexpected.

The exact sense of πίστις in this passage may also be open to debate. Although Evelyn-White translates “Trust and distrust alike ruin men”, there is a context of formal arrangements or pledges in this short passage, if we are to take the proceeding lines as specific instances of the general rule in 372. Furthermore, although the exact sense of the agreement in line 371 is unclear, the agreement in line 370 is not one of trust on the listener’s side, but in fact one of the opposite: one should be reliable for one’s friends. Again, if we are to rhyme the general statement in 372 with the other two lines, it does not seem to be a question of trust on the part of the listener, but exactly the opposite. The fact that the next 3 lines *do* talk about trust on the listener’s side explicitly seem to confirm this fact. Mourelatos (1970, 140) takes line 371 to refer to others keeping their promises, concluding that the advice is

¹The first translations in the LSJ are “trust” and “faith” respectively.

²See the Appendix for a full overview of the results of this corpus research.

³Translations mine, except when indicated. In these translations I leave πίστις untranslated, so as not to beg the question this thesis is trying to answer.

to keep your own promises *and* to make sure that others do too.⁴ It seems problematic to me, however, to assume that 371 *does* refer to trust on the listener's side, since it is sandwiched in between line 370, about trustworthiness, on the one side, and the general advice in 372 followed by the advice about trusting women. Here also, the pattern seems to be that he starts with specific advice and ends with a more oneliner-like statement (373-4 and 375 respectively), so it seems reasonable to assume the same for line 372.

In Herodotus, the term occurs 14 times, of which, according to the translation of Godley, 12 times it has the meaning "pledge", whereas 2 times it is translated as "trust". With the analysis of Latin *fidēs* by Benveniste (1969) in mind, it is interesting to revisit these passages.

παρὰ γὰρ τοῖσι βαρβάροισι τιμώτεροι εἰσὶ οἱ εὐνοῦχοι πίστιος εἵνεκα τῆς πάσης
τῶν ἐνορχίων.

"For among the barbarians eunuchs are more honored than non-castrated men
because of their πίστις in all respects" (Hdt. 8.105.2)

Although Godley translates "trust", in the particular construction "by reason of the full trust that they have in them", πίστις does not seem to be something that belongs to the person who has faith in someone else, but rather it belongs with the person in whom there is faith and is transferred to the other person. The best translation may be simply "trustworthiness".

The other passage, taken from book 3 of his *Histories*, is a bit more ambiguous, and we might here also follow Godley's translation of trust:

ὁ δὲ Ὀτάνης παραλαβὼν Ἀσπαθίνην καὶ Γοβρύην, Περσέων τε πρώτους ἔοντας
καὶ ἑωυτῷ ἐπιτηδεοτάτους ἐς πίστιν

"Otanes invited Aspathines and Gobryas, the first of the Persians and for him
most fitting for πίστις" (Hdt. 3.70.1)

Here, the passage does not clearly favour one translation of πίστις over the other, although it does not seem far-fetched to argue that, when these two Persians are called ἐπιτηδεοτάτους ἐς πίστιν, this πίστις is an attribute not of Otanes but of these Persians. A few short lines later, however, we find another reference to πίστις, this time also by Godley translated as "pledge" and still talking about the same group of men (that has, however, been enlarged in the intervening lines). This succession may lead us to believe that perhaps here also, "trust" is not the best translation after all. In that case we may translate "most fitting for a pledge".

In the tragedians, we find partly a similar picture, although also here we find passages cited for the LSJ translation "faith":

ἤδη δ' ὁθούνεκ' ἄνδρα καὶ πατροκτόνον
κἄναγνον οὐ δεξοίαιτ', οὐδ' ὅτῳ γάμοι
ζυνόντες ἠυρέθησαν ἀνόσιοι τέκνων.
τοιούτον αὐτοῖς Ἄρεος εὐβουλον πάγον
ἐγὼ ξυνήδη χθόνιον ὄνθ', ὃς οὐκ ἔῃ
τοιούσδ' ἀλήτας τῇδ' ὁμοῦ ναίειν πόλει:
ᾧ πίστιν ἴσχω τήνδ' ἐχειρούμην ἄγρην. (Sophocles, *Oedipus Coloneus* 944-950)
"I knew that they would not receive a man, both a parricide

⁴His conclusion that πίστις is supposed to refer to both sides of the argument also figures in his discussion of the term in Parmenides, but he cites no further explicit support for it there either.

and unclean, especially one whose unholy marriage, with children, was found out.

I knew that the Areopagus was so prudent, which does not allow such wanderers to abide in this city:

Having πίστιν for this I sought to take this prey.”

Theseus asked Kreon why he thought it was right to take away suppliants to his city by force, and he explains that he did this because he knew that the city of Athens wouldn't receive a parricide and children born of an incestuous marriage, answering to the charge that he did injustice to the city of Athens through his actions. That this can not really be cited as a case of “faith” is shown by the two verbs “to know” used in the preceding part. He *knew* that the Athenians wouldn't have a parricide in their city, so he didn't need to have *faith* in it. Rather, perhaps, we should translate that he took this as a “guarantee” that his actions would be acceptable.

In conclusion, in fact just as Benvéniste proved for the Latin equivalent *fidēs*, πίστις in all these cases is not “faith”, “belief”, or “persuasion”, but something that is deposited with someone else leading to trust. Mostly, this means “pledge”, and is used subjectively, but it can also be “proof”, in which case it is of course objective. More abstractly it can mean “credibility” or “trustworthiness”.

2 Πίστις between ontology and epistemology: Parmenides

The entire history of Western philosophy has been seen as a series of footnotes to Plato. Of course Plato's relevance cannot be denied, but as we will see in the chapter about him, he takes considerable influences from other philosophers and especially Parmenides. Parmenides may be taken as one of the most influential on his thought. This is perhaps not surprising, as in its turn philosophy between Parmenides and Plato could be described as a series of footnotes to Parmenides. According to Diogenes Laërtius, he was at the highest point of his fame around 500 BC, but if we must imagine any historical accuracy to his visit to Athens in Plato's dialogue named after him, he would have to have been born around 515 BC. Although he in turn builds on the work of earlier Ionian natural philosophers⁵ he is the first to think systematically both about being and about knowledge, thus founding both *ontology* and *epistemology*.⁶ Parmenides' treatise is built up of three parts, the proem, the way of truth, and the way of opinion. The themes being as they are, it is clear that whatever we think the translation of πίστις should be, it falls somehow inbetween truth and opinion. I will therefore treat the two questions of the connection between the three parts of the poem and of the use of πίστις by Parmenides together.

2.1 The proem

The proem (fragment 1 DK) describes a journey made by the poet/philosopher⁷ to the realm of a Goddess who remains unnamed throughout. He travels on a chariot pulled by mares and

⁵pace Kahn (1969), who thought that Parmenides' treatise is primarily a thought exercise, which of course cannot account well for the fact that the majority of the work was concerned with the cosmology.

⁶His influence reaches so far that in fact in modern logical philosophy we still have a law named after him: For something to be known, it must be true (cf. Hintikka (1962, p. 22).

⁷Both terms apply to him, although the term “philosopher”, as with all pre-Socratics, is a bit anachronistic.

guided by the daughters of the Sun. That the journey in some way has something to do with knowledge is made clear in the third line already:

Ἴπποι, ταί με φέρουσιν, ὅσον τ' ἐπὶ θυμὸς ἰκάνοι
πέμπον, ἐπεὶ μ' ἐς ὁδὸν βῆσαν πολύφημον ἄγουσαι
δαίμονος ἥ κατὰ πάντα ἄτῃ φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα·
“The horses, which carry me, sent me as far as my heart desired,
as leading me they put me on the renowned way of the goddess,
which leads a knowing man through everything.”

Perhaps most relevant to the connection with the other parts is the part where Parmenides describes the gate of the paths of night and day (11–17):

ἔνθα πύλαι νυκτός τε καὶ ἡματός εἰσι κελεύθων,
καὶ σφας ὑπέρθυρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λάϊνος οὐδός,
αὐταὶ δ' αἰθέριαι πλῆνται μεγάλοισι θυρέτροις·
τῶν δὲ δίκη πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς.
τὴν δὴ παρφάμεναι κοῦραι μαλακοῖσι λόγοισι
πεῖσαν ἐπιφραδέως, ὥς σφιν βαλανωτὸν ὀχῆα
ἀπτερώς ὥσειε πυλέων ἄπο·
“There the gates of the paths of Night and Day are,
and a lintel and a stone threshold hold them on both sides.
They themselves, etherial, are filled up by large doors;
Of these much-avenging Justice keeps the fitting keys.
Her the maidens, appeasing with sweet words,
cunningly persuaded, to swiftly thrust for them the bolted bar
from the gates.”

Significant first of all is that we are talking about the paths of Night and Day, the two elements that will figure prominently in his cosmology in the way of the Δόξα. Apart from that, the language of the gates is connected to the description of both the gates of the Tartarus in Homer and Hesiod (© 15, *theog.* 811), and Laestrygonia, as noted by Coxon (2009, p. 275). Although at first glance the journey might seem to be to a place of more light (and many commentators take this to be the case), Burkert (1969) argues that in fact the only evidence in the text for this position would be the journey towards the light (10) and the fact that the gates are called αἰθέριαι. If we abandon this idea of the journey towards the light, perhaps informed a bit too much by Platonic-Christian symbolism (Burkert 1969, 15), the proem is in fact rather straightforward. It seems then that we are indeed going *beyond* the domains of Night and Day, to the origins of the world. Burkert further connects this journey of Parmenides with the Pythagorean κατάβασις, but as he himself puts it, this is something temporary, and he uses this usual mythical form to connect himself to both Hesiod and Pythagoras, as well as other revelatory theogonies, such as those of “Orpheus” and Epimenides (Burkert, 1969, p. 29).

Oliver Primavesi connects this interpretation of the proem directly to the connection between the two main parts, the truth and the opinion, of Parmenides’ treatise. According to him, it is especially significant that we see the entire conversation as taking place in the house of night, i.e. in perpetual darkness. This means that the eyes, in many aspects always the first of the senses, are useless here, and we must go solely by thinking (Primavesi, 2011, p. 225).

2.2 The description of the Ways

After greeting Parmenides, the anonymous goddess starts explaining to Parmenides that she will teach him *everything*, expounded on in 29–32:

ἡμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος⁸ ἀτρεμές ἦτορ
ἢ δὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής.
ἀλλ’ ἔμπης καὶ ταῦτα μαθήσεται, ὥς τὰ δοκοῦντα
χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα.
“Both the untrembling heart of well-convincing truth,
and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true πίστις.
But you will learn them nonetheless, seeing how the appearances
had to be acceptable, as they all go through all things.”

The curriculum is to be divided into the ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος ἀτρεμές ἦτορ, the “unshaken heart of unshaken truth” and βροτῶν δόξας “opinions of mortals”. It is here that Parmenides’ πίστις makes its first appearance: it said of the opinions of mortals τῆς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής. This is often translated “in which there is no genuine belief”, but what does that mean? According to some commentators, this is the first occasion where we see that the way of Opinion should not be taken seriously and is indeed meant to show the folly of the mortals *only*. I will come back to this in the next section. As we have seen, πίστις doesn’t generally have the meaning “belief”. In principle, this does not exclude us for assuming it for Parmenides, but first we should see if the more objective account, i.e. “proof”, works. Verdenius (1949, p. 49) thought that it did, and stated that we should translate “evidence”. This seems to work for a more favorable interpretation of the way of opinion. The only thing ruled out for the way of opinion there is a logical proof, such as the one provided for Being on the way of Truth. Verdenius only says here that Parmenides “had a demonstration in mind” (1949, p. 49) but is not explicit about the type of demonstration. The difference may be that the opinions of mortals always have something to do with sensory perception, while Being is connected with pure logic. For this reason it can have no πίστις, which, in this interpretation means nothing more than that it doesn’t constitute true knowledge and can only stay opinion. This does *not*, as many other commentators have thought, mean that the opinions are worthless altogether, merely that they do not constitute absolute truth or knowledge.⁹ Coxon (2009) also has an interesting interpretation not clearly based on any translation of πίστις when he says (p. 284) “πίστις is the certainty resulting from the persuasion which reality exercises on the mind by causing it to reason deductively”. With “Reality” Coxon refers to Being, not to the physical world, so perhaps simply sticking to Being might be better. I agree with most of the other terms involved, and it comes down to the same thing, but I would argue based on the data of chapter 1 above that πίστις is not primarily the certainty in the mind, but rather the “proof” that Being gives of its own existence, which comes in the form of logical reasoning.

Dehon gives a very good overview of the different ways in which the final lines of this passage can be interpreted, dividing them into 5 types, mostly dependent on different interpretations of ταῦτα and ὥς and the connection between the two [Dehon88, 274–277]:

⁸This reading is to be preferred to the alternative εὐκυκλῆος from Simplicius, as Coxon (2009, 283) argues, since Being would not be *like* a sphere (fragment 8), but *actually* a sphere, following this reading. Certainly this makes Parmenides’ description much more physical and material than is reasonable based on the text.

⁹We might see a confirmation of this in Plato’s argument about knowledge in the Republic and the Timaeus, which is treated in its own chapter below; this lines up more or less directly with Parmenides’ ideas when viewed in this way.

- (a) “you will not only learn the two things mentioned above, but also:”
- (b) “even though opinions of mortals are devoid of πίστις, you will learn also:”
- (c) “but in any case you will learn this too:”
- (d) “but even though opinions of mortals are devoid of πίστις, you must learn them anyway”
- (e) “but in any case you will learn these too”

For Dehon, (a) is the most true rendition of the text. To (c) and (e) he objects that the opposition is weakened too much, with which I agree. He tentatively offers that the opposition is also weakened too much in (b) and (e), where it is connected only to the relative clause, but this “weakening” felt by him seems rather trivial to me. The main objection, then, is connecting ταῦτα not to the passage that follows but the one that precedes. It is true, as Dehon argues (277) that the closeness of ταῦτα and ὥς suggests a connection between the two, but it is by no means the only option. The problem with Dehon’s suggestions, as he himself recognizes but does not discuss further, is that adding a third object of learning somewhat breaks the strongly felt two-part listing indicated by ἡμὲν ... ἡδὲ. Admittedly, also in Homer these words are sometimes used to list more than two parts, but when this is the case a further ἡδὲ is always added.

Another reason to prefer reading (c) is the way in which the three words with δοκ- as their root are distributed over the passage as a whole. The connection between δόξα on the one hand and δοκοῦντα and δοκίμως on the other seems too obvious to be ignored, and in my view therefore strongly suggests that this sentence too refers to the δόξα. Finally, despite the fact that Dehon claims that the opposition is weakened in this case, at the very least it is very easily explained as a concession to the lack of πίστις in human opinions. “If there is no true πίστις in them”, Parmenides might reply to the goddess or we as readers might reply to Parmenides, “why am I learning them anyway?”

A large number of scholars nevertheless agree with Dehon’s assessment of this passage: According to both Mourelatos and Tarán, the goddess says here that she will be talking about three things. Mourelatos further struggles quite a bit with the juxtaposition of “the dok-words” with πίστις in this passage, as he takes the meaning of the former from Redard who calls it *je reçois ce que je juge bon de recevoir* “I receive what I think is good to receive”. Then indeed, the accepting denoted by these words comes very close to his view of πίστις. It then remains to be argued why, if their meanings are so close, they are so explicitly juxtaposed by Parmenides. From another point of view, the Parmenidean logic is quite simple: πίστις and πείθω are exclusively the domain of truth, and δόξα is excluded from this very explicitly.

Whatever ταῦτα is supposed to refer to, what does it mean that the δοκοῦντα χρῆν δοκίμως εἶναι διὰ παντὸς πάντα περῶντα? According to Verdenius, we should translate “how their opinions in an acceptable way had to permeate all” (1949, 50).

2.3 The way of Truth/Being

A second argument for what Parmenides means by this πίστις can be found in the description of Being in fragment 8, 10-12 and in the similar fragment in 8,26–28:

οὕτως ἢ πάμπαν πελέναι χρεών ἐστὶν ἢ οὐχί.
οὐδέ ποτ' ἐκ μὴ ἐόντος ἐφήσει πίστις ἰσχύς
γίγνεσθαι τι παρ' αὐτό· τοῦ εἵνεκεν οὔτε γενέσθαι (10-12)
“So it is necessary that it is entirely or not.
for never will the power of πίστις
allow that something comes to be apart from itself;”

αὐτὰρ ἀκίνητον μεγάλων ἐν πείρασι δεσμῶν
ἐστὶν ἀναρχὸν ἄπανστον, ἐπεὶ γένεσις καὶ ὄλεθρος
τῆλε μάλ' ἐπλάγχθησαν, ἀπῶσε δὲ πίστις ἀληθείης· (26-28)
“But unmoved in the bounds of great chains,
it is without beginning, without end, since birth and death
were banished very far away, and a true πίστις pushed them off.”

Can it be that Parmenides is saying here that whatever you do, you will never be able to believe that something comes from nothing? Specifically, the power of πίστις will not allow it. Certainly there does not seem anything against *believing* that something comes out of nothing, as before Parmenides, in his view, anyone believing in generation did this implicitly. More importantly, it would be begging the question. “Belief”, then, is ruled out. What is Parmenides’ point here? It is described of Being that both a beginning and an end have been pushed away by a true πίστις. For both cases, πίστις is often translated as “belief” or “conviction” (e.g. Coxon) or something else of the sort. These translations have a number of issues. First of all, it is hard to see a “belief” or a “conviction” to possess a power so great as to “push away” anything at all (the same verb is used in *Il.* 8.206 for “driving back” of the Trojans). In the first fragment we also see a similar reference to the ἰσχύς of (a?) πίστις which makes very little sense if it is supposed to mean “belief”. Mourelatos (1970, 151) agrees on this point. Most importantly, however, it reduces the value of the argument Parmenides is making here to absolutely nothing: Being is ἀναρχὸν “without beginning” and ἄπανστον “without end”, because there is no beginning of ending, because we truly believe that to be the case. Of course, in this reading of Parmenides, there is a true conviction *because* it is the truth, but if we would like to save the argument in this way the πίστις seems rather irrelevant and we would rather have expected a call to ἀλήθεια. By translating πίστις *not* as “belief”, “conviction” or “persuasion” but as “proof”, as was also argued for the parallel occurrence in fragment 1, we can let the argument retain its value naturally. There is no beginning of ending for Being, because of the argument that was presented just now, in lines 5–15 and lines 19–21 respectively.

2.4 Mourelatos on πίστις

Mourelatos (1970) also devotes an entire chapter of his book to Parmenidean persuasion, and of course the use of the term πίστις figures quite prominently here as well. According to Mourelatos (1970, 139) the word refers to different “aspects of the relationship of agreeable commitment”. He distinguishes six modes of this relationship (140): (a) the initial promise of A to B; (b) the acceptance of that promise; (c) B’s promise; (d) the “continued maintenance of the relationship to the benefit of B and as the responsibility of A”, (e) vice versa, and (f) for and by both parties. Although these modes seem logical indeed, he provides no evidence that the term can and does in fact refer to all of this possibilities. Furthermore, especially

in the case of the final three modes, it seems unlikely that we can be sure to identify any specific mode in a certain context.

When he considers the occurrences of πίστις in fragment 8 described above, his conclusion is that the correction translation here is “fidelity”, referring to the commitment mediating the relationship (1970, 151). Because it refers in both cases to coming-to-be and perishing, presumably this “fidelity” associated with being entails that it remains what it is, but he does not answer this question explicitly. Nor does he explain the exact participants of the bond mentioned, only that it “binds the real to its station”. I remain unconvinced that this translation for πίστις carries the necessary force to function in both arguments. This specific “fidelity” sounds to me rather equivalent to “staying what it is”, so especially in the second part of fragment 8 the conclusion seems tautological.

Perhaps most importantly, I am very skeptical that the kind of “fidelity” that Mourelatos suggests is a possible interpretation of πίστις. It remains unclear to me on which basis he does so. Even if, however, we conclude that it is indeed possible, it not only renders the argument quite circular, “It stays the way it is because it stays the way it is”, but it also cannot connect well to the exclusive bond between Πειθώ and the truth that is described in fragment 2. 9-10, discussed below. Parmenides describes the truth as having an exclusive relationship with both πίστις and πειθώ. Although there is of course a possibility that they are *not* in fact connected, an interpretation of πίστις that *can* be connected in some way to πειθώ certainly seems preferable.

2.5 The way of Opinion

Another reason the right interpretation of πίστις in fragment 1 is so important is that the passage in which it occurs is vital for the connection between the two (doctrinal) parts found in Parmenides’ poem. This issue has been debated in philosophy throughout the centuries, and in modern times no stable consensus has been reached. The second vital passage is B8, where the goddess shifts from her tale about Being to the opinions of mortals:

ἐν τῷ σοι παύω πιστὸν λόγον ἡδὲ νόημα (50)
ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης· δόξας δ’ ἀπὸ τοῦδε βροτείας
μάνθανε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούων.
μορφὰς γὰρ κατέθεντο δύο γνώμας ὀνομάζειν·
τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεὼν ἐστὶν—ἐν ᾧ πεπλανημένοι εἰσὶν—
“Here I stop my speech and thought to you, possessing πίστις,
about the truth. From here, learn mortal opinions,
listening to the deceptive arrangement of my words.
for they established forms to name two ideas,
of which one is wrong, in this they are deceived”

The goddess stops her λόγος and νόημα, possessing πίστις, about truth; now, Parmenides must learn the mortal opinions by listening to her deceptive arrangement of words. Tarán (1965) takes this passage together with his translation of πίστις ἀληθείς to mean that everything that follows is purely about showing the errors in the ways of the mortals. The translation “belief” for πίστις works well for this explanation: we are invited not to believe anything Parmenides’ says here, according to him. I find this explanation lacking for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the second part of Parmenides’ treatise seems overly long if this is the only point. Also, if we are supposed *not* to believe these opinions and Parmenides

is really criticizing them, it would make sense for these opinions to actually be ideas other people had about the world. Although e.g. Tarán connects some of these opinions to other thinkers, in antiquity (e.g. by Aristotle) they were treated as his own ideas, and especially considering the length of the argument this seems likely to me. The goddess names her account “deceptive”, not “untrue”. The possible positive notions attached to ἀπατη, although postdating Parmenides, are discussed also by Segal’s article about Gorgias. It seems reasonable to adopt a not entirely negative view of ἀπατηλός here too. The γὰρ in the next line is most readily understood as an explanation of ἀπατηλός, confirmed by the line following that: the error of the mortal lies in the establishing of two forms, of which one “is not necessary”: Mourelatos (1970, p. 207) points out that the negation of χρέων is not “not necessary” in the sense of “possibly not”, but in the sense of “it is wrong”.

The final issue with Tarán’s idea about the way of Opinion is the way he sees it to be built up. According to him, the goddess is showing Parmenides explicitly *how* mortal opinions came to be acceptable¹⁰, starting from the one error they make in the beginning (of starting from the two ideas of Day and Night). He explains this statement in considerable detail, but how exactly he envisions this remains unclear to me. To me, explaining “how these opinions would have to be acceptable” would be explaining how mortals can have these experiences if there is no reality at all in the physical world. Obviously Tarán’s explanation falls flat here, as the positing of Night and Day may be wrong, but it is based on the physical world and certainly not the cause of it.

Instead, it makes sense, especially considering Parmenides’ earlier insistence that the same thing “exists for being and for thinking” (in Coxon’s translation of fragment B3) to see the different parts, as most probably Plato also did¹¹, as instantiating two different parts of discourse. The first part, which is the absolute truth is characterized as πιστόν “possessing πίστις”, a λόγον and a νόημα. All these terms are explicitly reserved for the first part of the work, with good reason. Only something about Being could be characterized as a νόημα, which is confirmed by fragment B2,7 and B8, 35–36. If we should see the term λόγον separately, this might refer back to the argument in fragment 6, line 1, that it is necessary τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ’ ἐὸν ἔμμεναι “to say and to think that this is Being”. Alternatively, we could connect it to the passage just before the different qualities that being has, where the goddess tells Parmenides not to use his senses, as men are used to doing, but decide everything by reasoning (λόγος) instead:

μηδέ σ’ ἔθος πολύπειρον ὁδὸν κατὰ τήνδε βιάσθω
 νωμᾶν ἄσκοπον ὄμμα καὶ ἠχήεσσαν ἀκουήν
 καὶ γλῶσσαν, κρίναι δὲ λόγῳ πολύδηριν ἔλεγχον
 ἐξ ἐμέθεν ῥηθέντα. (B7, 3–6)

“Neither may the abundance of experience of habit force you
 to cast an unviewing eye and sounding ear
 and tongue, but decide by reason the much disputed refutation
 that is spoken by me.”

¹⁰This is, obviously, based on his interpretation of the ending of fragment 1, discussed above.

¹¹See the chapter on Plato below and particularly the discussion of πίστις in the Republic and the Timaeus for more about this point.

2.6 Πειθώ and πίστις

Another angle into the way πίστις is used by Parmenides is to examine the occurrence of related terms. We may compare most directly the use of the related noun πειθώ “persuasion” (2.9–10):

ἡ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὥς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι,
Πειθοῦς ἐστι κέλευθος (Ἀληθείη γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ),
“That, that it is and that it is not for not being,
is the road of Persuasion (for it accompanies truth),”

So what is the exact nature of this connection between persuasion and truth? Parmenides uses the term ὀπηδεῖ. The LSJ definition is “follow, accompany, attend” but this seems rather broad. Mourelatos (1970, 158) went through the separate Homeric and Hesiodic attestations of the term. The use of the word in Homer can be of gods to faithful mortals, but also of servants to human masters (thus Priam’s servant in *Il.* 24.339). It also occurs with other entities as its subject, as for example the virtues or someone’s bow. In Hesiod, four of the five attestations are of this final type. Importantly, as Mourelatos points out, ὀπηδεῖν is not a relation “of matter-of-fact attachment, accompaniment, or attendance” (158). Mourelatos sees a normative notion here rather than one in the factual realm, but I do not see how the passages from Hesiod he cites are supposed to prove this, as most of these do favour a factual reading. The particular nature of the relationship denoted by this word seems to me to be either exceptionally strong or temporally of great duration, as is the case with the archer and his bow, Priam and his servant (or, for the related term ὀπάων, Idomeneus and Merones), and the Hesiodic virtues. The second important semantic feature of this word is that there is always a certain asymmetry in the relationship, and in some way the subject of ὀπηδεῖ is governed by its complement, which can be seen more or less clearly in all attestations. I agree with Mourelatos’ conclusion that ὀπηδεῖ refers to “Persuasion’s custody of truth or to the favor that she bestows on truth”.

Mourelatos’ explanation ties in to his explanation of Parmenidean πίστις discussed above. As he puts it (160), “the route of positive predication is the ‘course of Persuasion’ because it is the plea, the παραίφασις which Peitho herself would use in her approach of favorable attendance to truth. (...) Truth, in adhering to its bond of πίστις, will exercise a compelling power of allurement over men, both each and all.” Mourelatos’ “power of allurement” still seems very abstract, however, and does in no way illuminate what it is that Parmenides means exactly when he says that Πειθώ ὀπηδεῖ Ἀληθείη. Coxon’s interpretation of πίστις for Parmenides on the other hand seems more useful (2009, 283): the specific thing that separates truth from non-truth is its relationship with logical reasoning. Only logical reasoning leads us to discover the truth. This use of πειθώ and its exclusive connection to the truth again shows that translating “belief”, “conviction”, or anything of the sort for Parmenides’ πίστις makes his arguments less compelling.

2.7 Conclusion

Persuasion as a whole, and πίστις in particular, for Parmenides can be seen as inherently *objective*: it always has a connection to truth (and Being), and as such is unavoidable once humans are guided onto the right path. As we have seen, what meaning we give to the word πίστις for Parmenides has considerable impact upon our interpretation of the connection

between the two parts of his work. There are also commentators that do believe in a more positive attitude towards the second part of Parmenides' treatise, such as Coxon, who see πίστις as a more relativistic "conviction" or "belief". If we conclude, however, as I have argued above, that Verdenius was right in seeing that πίστις for Parmenides refers to a specific kind of logical (objective) *proof*, a more positive attitude towards the second part of the work follows almost automatically: the only thing that is excluded for the opinions of mortals is the claim to knowledge which can be demonstrated solely through pure logic, without the use of sense perception. Nevertheless, seeing as they are so all-pervasive, they have to somehow be acceptable (δοκίμως) and *even though* it does not qualify as ultimate truth, the Goddess will still tell Parmenides all about it, so that he will not be beaten by others who make nice cosmologies.

3 Saving the physical world: Πίστις in Empedocles

3.1 Empedoclean epistemology

The most important distinction between the doctrines of Parmenides and (according to some) his pupil Empedocles is the position of the physical world within the philosophical theory. For Parmenides, no matter what we think of the exact position of the second part of his treatise, the physical world has no ultimate reality because it isn't Being (fragment B8, from line 50 onwards), and as such, we can't get any knowledge from our senses (fragment B7). Empedocles explicitly goes against this statement from his predecessor when he prefaces his cosmology (according to the majority of modern editors) saying that they should hear his λόγου στόλον οὐκ ἀπατηλόν "non-deceptive road of argument" (B17.26). This has been called "polemic" to Parmenides, but this, in my view, puts too much emphasis on the differences between the two and not enough on the considerable (positive) influence that Parmenides clearly had on Empedocles. However, it explains perfectly Empedocles' departure: the account of the physical world is not deceptive. That is to say, it is no longer excluded from possessing either πίστις or truth, the two of which are still connected to each other as in Parmenides. Modern translations often assume a use of πίστις for Empedocles that does more or less "soften" the relationship between it and the truth, but I hope to show that these translations are unwarranted.

3.2 Πίστις, persuasion and sense perception

οὐκ ἔστιν πελάσασθαι ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἐφικτόν
 ἡμετέροις ἢ χερσὶ λαβεῖν, ἥτις τε μεγίστη
 πειθοῦς ἀνθρώποισιν ἀμαξίτος εἰς φρένα πίπτει. (B133)
 "It is not possible to approach it in our eyes
 or grasp it with the hands, through which the largest
 way of Persuasion for man falls into the brain."

People are used to be persuaded by the senses, but for the divine, according to Clement, this is not possible. For Parmenides, this being persuaded by the senses is something typical for mortals, but we cannot rely on sense perceptions as conveying anything real, as fragment B7 shows. Empedocles instructs us explicitly *not* to keep πίστις away from any of the senses in fragment 3:

ἀλλ' ἄγ' ἄθρει πάση παλάμῃ, πῇ δῆλον ἕκαστον, (B3.14–) μήτε τιν' ὄψιν ἔχων
πίστει πλέον ἢ κατ' ἀκουήν
ἢ ἀκοὴν ἐρίδουπον ὑπὲρ τρανώματα γλώσσης,
μήτε τι τῶν ἄλλων, ὅποσιν πόρος ἐστὶ νοῆσαι, γυίων πίστιν ἔρυκε, νόει δ' ἣ δῆλον
ἕκαστον.

“But come, consider through every sense, how each thing is clear,
not holding any sight as greater for πίστις than what is according to sound,
or a ringing sound above that which is made clear to the tongue,
nor ward off from any of the other limbs, insofar as it is a pore to think, πίστις,
but think how each thing is clear.”

This passage expresses a crucial difference between Empedocles and Parmenides, as for Parmenides the senses are necessarily useless when it comes to knowing anything, as they are excluded from the truth, which also has an exclusive relationship with πίστις. For Empedocles, this is not true. We have to use our senses in a very well defined way, explained here. No single one of the senses is to be trusted over any of the others, nor should any sense be thought of as unable to provide evidence for anything, as long as we think how it is that these things in the senses come to us.

The reason that for Empedocles sense perception can have probative value is the purely materialistic way he views Being and the way this connects to his thinking about sense perception. Following Long (1966), it seems likely that both thinking and sense perception are connection to the way effluences (τὸ ἀπορρέον) interact with pores (πόροι) in the body. Note that this latter term is also used in fragment B3 about πίστις. Whereas we could be sure that Parmenidean πίστις is objective, this rehabilitation of the senses makes it hard to say that it is or isn't this same way for Empedocles. On the one hand, the purely materialistic explanation of the senses, and thus for Empedocles in terms of Being, could be said to support an objective view of πίστις. On the other hand, this passage in B3, where it is necessary to think more about sense perceptions in order to find out the truth would seem to point towards an (early?) *subjective* view of πίστις. We might, in this theory, also see a different use of Parmenides' statement that the same thing is “for being and for thinking” (fragment 3, as translated by Coxon): Being is divided up into the four elements, through which also sense perception and thinking is explained. In this way, Parmenides' two ways are merged into one and his cosmology can possess πίστις.

Although Long sees in this treatment of thinking and sense perception a further argument for the separation of the Καθαρμοί and the Περί Φύσεως, the simple fact that the mixture and separation of elements does not figure in the former work does not mean that they are two separate works.¹²

3.3 Πίστις for Empedocles

ὦ φίλοι, οἶδα μὲν οὐνεκ' ἀληθείῃ πάρα μύθοις,
οὐς ἐγὼ ἐξερέω· μάλα δ' ἀργαλέη γε τέτυκται
ἀνδράσι καὶ δύσζηλος ἐπὶ φρένα πίστιος ὁρμή. (B114)¹³ “My friends, I know that
there is truth in the tales

¹²As he himself acknowledges, this is an argument *e silentio* (Long, 1966, p. 274). The argument might be stronger if we had more explicit mentions of the two works from antiquity.

¹³This passages is traditionally ascribed to the Καθαρμοί, the religious treatise written by Empedocles. The case is too complicated to fully go into here, but Trepanier (2004) makes a compelling case that there *is* no

that I will tell; but very painful
for men and jealous is the rush of persuasion upon the brain.”

The translation “the flow of persuasion” (Trépanier, 2004, p. 109) might seem reasonable at first, but as we have already seen above, there are multiple reasons from outside the text to prefer a different translation. The phrase itself is reminiscent of Parmenides fragment 8.12, which was discussed above. It is said furthermore of this “rush of πίστις” that it is ἀργαλή and δύσζηλος. As commentators have noticed, this passage acknowledges that although what Empedocles here is telling is the truth, and he knows that it is, it may be hard to accept. But what exactly do these two qualifiers of the ὁρμή πίστιος mean? Ἀργαλή is cited as meaning both “painful” and “hard to attain”. The latter translation is used sometimes for this passage as well; in that case it is mostly interpreted as belonging to ἀληθείη. This seems problematic syntactically as we would have two copulative sentences in a row, with the first missing a subject and the second missing a copula. While neither of the two is in itself impossible, the combination of the two would suggest that the most direct interpretation is that they simply form one sentence with two different adjectives predicated to πίστιος ὁρμή. It is also hard to see how the “rush of persuasion”, which suggests a certain violence¹⁴ exerted upon the mind, could be said to be “hard (to attain)”. Looking at the Homeric precedents for the use of this adjective suggests that in most cases it should simply mean “painful”. Note also that the meaning “hard” is not easy to establish separately anyway, because the translation “painful” would in most cases still work as well.

Δύσζηλος, generally “jealous”, is used significantly less in Greek, and in Empedocles it occurs exclusively here. Although the LSJ suggests a translation “eager”, this is based solely on this attestation, so there is no real basis for it. In Homer it also occurs exactly once, in *Od.* 7.307:

ἡ μὲν γάρ μ’ ἐκέλευε σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισιν ἔπεσθαι,
ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἔθελον δέϊσας αἰσχυρόμενός τε,
μή πως καὶ σοὶ θυμὸς ἐπισκύσσαιτο ἰδόντι:
δύσζηλοι γάρ τ’ εἰμὲν ἐπὶ χθονὶ φῦλ’ ἀνθρώπων.
“For she ordered me to follow along with the servant girls,
but I didn’t want to, out of fear and shame,
so that your heart would not be indignant when you saw it,
for jealous are we, tribes of men upon the earth.”

Here, Odysseus explains to Alkinoös, who has just rebuked his daughter for not bringing him along to the palace with the maidens, that Nausikaä did suggest exactly this, but that Odysseus refused out of fear that seeing this would make Alkinoös angry, for we tribes of men on earth are δύσζηλοι. Connecting this to some kind of jealousy seems likely. “Causing distrust”, the translation offered by the Loeb edition of the fragments of the Pre-Socratics does not seem to connect to the meaning of the adjective well enough, nor does it make sense in combination with πίστις. Zuntz (1971, p. 193), although he is right in keeping the two parts of the two sentences together, predicated of πίστιος ὁρμή, suggests the translation “of a kind

separate religious work. According to Clement (Strom. 5.1), where this quotation comes from, it is a “celebration of faith”. Whichever view of Empedocles’ works we adhere to, the source does not ascribe it to a particular work and there is no reason to *a priori* separate it from the other occurrences of πίστις.

¹⁴This combination of πίστις and some sort of violence recalls the two occurrences in Parmenides B8 discussed above, the one about the ἴσχυς of πίστις and the other about it “pushing back” generation and destruction

which men are not eager to admit” for δύσζηλος, which seems impossible to connect to the Homeric passage cited above. He suggests that “LSJ are very wrong on this word”, but he does not provide specific evidence for this¹⁵. Other attestations make it clear that if the πίστις is δύσζηλος, it is not “which men are not eager to admit”, but as the connected noun should be the subject of the jealousy or in Zuntz’s terms the subject of the not-admitting.

It is, however, not too hard to think of a way in which the rush of a proof¹⁶ can be “jealous”. The worldview offered by Empedocles is, like Parmenides’ before him, quite different to that of the masses or of anyone not a follower of Empedocles. It is impossible for them to coexist in anyone’s mind: either the generally accepted view is true, or Empedocles’ is. In order to accept this truth from Empedocles, then, the generally accepted views must be ousted, which might well be painful.

εἰ δέ τί σοι περὶ τῶνδε λιπόζυλος ἔπλετο πίστις, (B71)
 πῶς ὕδατος γαίης τε καὶ αἰθέρος ἡελίου τε
 κίρναμένων εἶδη τε γενοίατο χροῖά τε θνητῶν
 τόσσ’, ὅσα νῦν γεγάασι συναρμοσθέντ’ Ἀφροδίτῃ ...
 “If your πίστις about the following somewhat lacks firmness,
 how when water and earth and air and sun
 are mixed, shapes come forth, and colors of mortals,
 as much as now are brought forth, fitted together by Love”

On first sight, this fragment of Empedocles, quoted by Simplicius, appears to show πίστις used rather unmistakably as “belief”, as any other translation in this sentence would not work well. It is not a sentence that can be parsed without hiccups, though. Τί would have to be taken to be used adverbially, “if your belief about the following somewhat lacks firmness”. In this particular construction, εἰ (δέ) τι(ς), which occurs innumerable times across Greek literature, this use would be *extremely* exceptional. The sentence grows all the more suspect when we look at the only other occurrence of the word λιπόζυλος, also from Simplicius quoting Empedocles (B21 1–2)

ἀλλ’ ἄγε τῶνδ’ ὁάρων προτέρων ἐπιμάρτυρα δέρκευ, (B21)
 εἴ τι καὶ ἐν προτέροισι λιπόζυλον ἔπλετο μορφῇ·
 “But come, see a witness of the former discourse,
 if anything in the former lacked firmness of form;”

Here, the use of τι is completely straightforward: “if anything in the former lacked firmness of form”. The parallel between these sentences, especially considering the fact they are the only two occurrences of the word λιπόζυλος in the whole of the Greek language, seems strong enough to assume that originally they were instances of the same construction. It is my guess, then, that the line in B71 became defective somewhere in the tradition, probably from original λιπόζυλον ... πίστει. Whether this occurred before or after Simplicius is hard to say, but the use of πίστις as “belief” in the line as handed down from Simplicius was surely unproblematic in Neoplatonic times, as it is of course used similarly in the New Testament, and Clement for example also cites B114 in a discourse about “faith”.

¹⁵unless he means the meaning “eager”, specifically, which is indeed clearly *ad hoc*.

¹⁶Certainly it does not mean “persuasion”, for that is πειθώ, an occurrence of which is discussed separately above.

3.4 Conclusion

Although for Empedocles, like for Parmenides, πίστις has traditionally been translated as “belief”, a closer examination of the attestations shows that, again like with Parmenides, this translation is unwarranted and does not convey the “force” that also for Empedocles it seems to have. The most important difference is that there is no longer a strict line between truth and the physical world, as Being for Empedocles is in fact physical, and therefore so is πίστις, and his cosmology can possess it while for Parmenides it could not. This does not mean that sense perceptions are in all occasions to be trusted, but we must consult the different senses and reason to see how things might truly be (fragment 3).

4 Gorgias: Separating persuasion from truth

Parmenides, as we saw above, stated explicitly that there is a special connection between the force of persuasion and truth. We do not have a fragment of Empedocles doing the same, but nevertheless he does announce his account to be the truth in fragment B114. Although Gorgias is generally seen as Empedocles’ student, and follows him on a lot of aspects, he clearly has a special interest in persuasion that his predecessors did not have so much. Both of his works that have been transmitted down to us have persuasion as one of his main topics. If we expect to find a more relativistic translation of the term πίστις before Plato, Gorgias might be a reasonable place to look, considering his explicit views on persuasion.

4.1 Gorgias’ theory of persuasion in the *Encomium of Helen*

Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen*, perhaps the most famous of the works of the sophists and one of the only still left to us today, is often treated as “a formal profession of the aims and the methods of his art” (Segal, 1962, p. 102). What better way to prove ones ability with words than to exculpate the mythical woman scorned by all of Greece for starting the Trojan war. Gorgias’ argument is rather simple and elegant. There are a number of reasons we can think of for Helen going to Troy (paragraph 6): because of Fortune, the gods, or Necessity; taken with force or persuaded with words, or through love. In all cases, Gorgias pleads, we cannot blame Helen, so she must be innocent.

In the *Encomium of Helen*, we see a very different kind of persuasion from the one that figured as the attendant of Truth in Parmenides. Not only does it have no connection to truth, but it is also a force of divine proportion that has emotional effects that trump reason. The way Gorgias’ two works treat persuasion *explicitly* is very different: persuasion as an almost divine force in the *Encomium of Helen*, from the perspective of the receiver, and from the very personal perspective of the sender in the *Defense of Palamedes*¹⁷, although Gorgias’ own argumentative reasoning is very similar in both cases.

In section 11 of the *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias talks about persuasion and opinion as concerning the δόξης ἀπατήματα, the deceptions of opinion, which brings to mind the point in Parmenides’ work where the Goddess starts talking about the mortal opinion. Segal calls Gorgias’ stance towards the Eleatic school “hostile” (1962, 114), but the only way in which Gorgias can be called hostile, then, is in the denunciation of the world of Being as

¹⁷Staying within the terms employed in this thesis, one might be tempted to call the first one “objective”, as it seems like there is nothing the receiver can do but be persuaded, and the second one “subjective”, as persuasion is made entirely dependent on the trustworthiness of the persuader and not of the argument

unattainable, and his keeping to the world of δόξα, while he seems to keep the Parmenidean dichotomy in place.

τοῦ δ' αὐτοῦ ἀνδρὸς λέξαι τε τὸ δέον ὀρθῶς καὶ ἐλέγξει τοὺς μεμφομένους Ἑλένην, γυναῖκα περὶ ἧς ὁμόφωνος καὶ ὁμόψυχος γέγονεν ἢ τε τῶν ποιητῶν ἀκουσάντων πίστις ἢ τε τοῦ ὀνόματος φήμη, ὃ τῶν συμφορῶν μνήμη γέγονεν. (*Enc.* 2)

“It is of the same man to say what is right rightly and to refute those who blame Helen, a woman about whom have become of one voice and one spirit both the πίστις of the poets who have heard it and the repute of her name, which has become a memorial of the misfortunes.”

Here it is said that the τῶν ποιητῶν ἀκουσάντων πίστις is ὁμόφωνος καὶ ὁμόψυχος, in agreement in voice and soul, with ἢ τε τοῦ ὀνόματος φήμη, the repute of her name. As this πίστις must be in agreement with a certain rumour, a repute, it seems to refer to the story that the poets tell of her, so to put it in terms closer to translations of πίστις mentioned earlier we might translate the “argument of the poets”. “The credence given to poets” (Loeb) certainly does not work, since it is not about the belief but about the story itself. Dillon and Gergel translate “the testimony of the inspired poets”, which *does* convey the right idea of πίστις here.

ὅστις μὲν οὖν καὶ δι' ὅτι καὶ ὅπως ἀπέπλησε τὸν ἔρωτα τὴν Ἑλένην λαβών, οὐ λέξω· τὸ γὰρ τοῖς εἰδόσιν ἃ ἴσασι λέγειν πίστιν μὲν ἔχει, τέρψιν δὲ οὐ φέρει. (*Enc.* 5)

“So who, why or how, sailed away, having taken Helen as his love, I will not tell: To tell those who know what they know has πίστις, but it doesn't bring enjoyment.”

So, we hear from Gorgias that the argument “has πίστις” when you tell people what they already know, “preaching to the converted” so to speak. “Credibility” or something similar seems a reasonable translation. Perhaps most interestingly is the fact that here πίστις combines with telling something to τοῖς εἰδόσιν, those who know. This shows that in this case, πίστις can have nothing to do with persuasion or “belief”; telling people something they already know neither persuades nor causes any belief.

τοὺς τῶν μετεωρολόγων λόγους, οἵτινες δόξαν ἀντὶ δόξης τὴν μὲν ἀφελόμενοι τὴν δ' ἐνεργασάμενοι τὰ ἄπιστα καὶ ἄδηλα φαίνεσθαι τοῖς τῆς δόξης ὁμμασιν ἐποίησαν· δεύτερον δὲ τοὺς ἀναγκαίους διὰ λόγων ἀγῶνας, ἐν οἷς εἷς λόγος πολὺν ὄχλον ἔτερψε καὶ ἔπεισε τέχνη γραφεῖς, οὐκ ἀληθεῖα λεχθεῖς· τρίτον δὲ φιλοσόφων λόγων ἀμίλλας, ἐν αἷς δείκνυται καὶ γνώμης τάχος ὡς εὐμετάβολον ποιοῦν τὴν τῆς δόξης πίστιν. (*Enc.* 13)

“The words of the astronomers, who, substituting opinions, taking away one and placing another, make that which has no πίστις and is unclear appear before the eyes of opinion; secondly, forced contests of words, in which one speech pleases and persuades a large crowd, written with skill but not spoken with truth; thirdly, struggles of philosophic arguments, in which speed of thought is shown to make the πίστις of an opinion easily changeable.

Here, Gorgias gives three examples how persuasion has an effect on the soul. Firstly, meteorologists can make things that are ἀπίστα καὶ ἀδηλα appear to the eye of opinion. The translation “unbelievable” for ἀπίστα seems overly negative to me. Certainly it is not the case that the things happening in the sky are in and of themselves unbelievable, but because they are so unclear, they don’t present any πίστις about themselves to the unlearned observer and are in this sense ἀπίστα. In the second example, Gorgias talks about speeches that persuade a crowd although they are not spoken with truth. When reading this, we may think back to Parmenides once again. This part seems a more or less explicit reversal of Parmenides’ Πειθώ, which attends truth. Gorgias says outright that speeches persuade not because of their relationship to truth, but simply because of the way they are written. Like Parmenides’ δόξα, this does not mean that it is explicitly *false*, merely that it does not gain its persuasive power from it being the truth. Finally, τὴν τῆς δόξης πίστιν surely does not mean the “conviction” or “belief” in an opinion, which would be an attitude towards a certain opinion, whereas πίστις, as is usual, is an attribute of the opinion itself, so “credibility of an opinion” seems best.

4.2 Πίστις in the Defense of Palamedes

Similar to the description of δόξα in the Encomium of Helen, the main dichotomy in the Defense of Palamedes could have been taken directly from Parmenides: Opinion is opposed to the truth, and, again like Parmenides, the former is described as the normal condition of the human mind.

ἀλλὰ δὴ καὶ τοῦτο γενέσθω, καίπερ οὐ γενόμενον. ἔδει δὲ μετὰ τούτους πίστιν δοῦναι καὶ δέξασθαι. τίς οὖν ἂν ἦν ἡ πίστις; (Def. 8)

“But alright, let’s say it did happen, although it didn’t. After this it would be necessary to give and receive πίστις. So what would have been the πίστις?”

Palamedes argues that he couldn’t have betrayed the Greeks, as they would have had to give and receive *guarantees*, but seeing as he would be a traitor, he would not have been believable.

βίος δὲ οὐ βιωτὸς πίστεως ἐστερημένω. (Def. 21)

“Life is not liveable for one who has been deprived of his *credibility* (<”ability to give guarantees“).”

In paragraph 24 Gorgias says that Odysseus didn’t know Palamedes had done anything but he was in fact δόξη πιστεύσας, ἀπιστοτάτῳ πράγματι. The lack of πίστις of opinion of course brings to mind the exact same statement made by Parmenides, and the way Gorgias describes the dichotomy between truth and opinion seems like something Parmenides might well have agreed with.

4.3 Conclusion

Despite Gorgias’ great interest being not in truth but in rhetoric, the theory of persuasion, perhaps surprisingly, seems to use the distinction between truth and opinion as formulated by Parmenides.¹⁸ Πίστις, for Gorgias, still holds the earlier value of either “proof” or abstract

¹⁸Similarly, in Gorgias’ work on Non-Being, he turns Parmenides’ Being upside-down, but using similar arguments and wording.

“credibility”. Gorgias, as a sophist, is often described as holding very relativistic views, but as great as the influences from Empedocles and Parmenides are, it warrants further research to check whether or not our perception of Gorgias is not *too* coloured by Plato’s opinion of him. Especially in the Encomium of Helen, the view of the role of the person persuaded in the process makes persuasion look like a remarkably objective thing. As Gorgias argues, she could not help but be persuaded.

5 Turning πίστις around: Platonic epistemology

5.1 Plato’s non-philosophical πίστις

As shown above, the use of the term πίστις is instrumental in understanding the theses of both Parmenides and Empedocles and the way the latter expounds on the teachings of the former. That Plato does the same thing with the teachings of his predecessors is pretty clear, as can be seen when we look at his epistemology. Although he takes cues from multiple of his predecessors, the influence of Parmenides is particularly clear. Within Plato, we can divide the occurrences of πίστις in broadly two categories. The first is in general, non-philosophical use, in which I will argue Plato conforms to the established general uses sketched in the first chapter. His *philosophical* use of πίστις is in this respect very remarkable, and looking at this in detail may shine a light on the relationship of Plato’s ideas both amongst themselves and to those of his predecessors.

ἀλλὰ τοῦτο δὴ ἴσως οὐκ ὀλίγης παραμυθίας δεῖται καὶ πίστεως, ὥς ἔστι τε ψυχὴ ἀποθανόντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τινα δύναμιν ἔχει καὶ φρόνησιν.

“But perhaps here there is need of no small argument and πίστις, that the soul of a man that has died exists and has any power and capability for thought.”
(*Phaedo* 70d)

ὃς ἂν μὴ διαπονήσῃται τὸ πᾶσαν πίστιν λαβεῖν τῶν οὐσῶν περὶ θεῶν; “who doesn’t commit to grasping the entire πίστις about the gods existing” ἄρα οὖν ἴσμεν ὅτι δύο ἔστων τῶ περὶ θεῶν ἄγοντε εἰς πίστιν, ὅσα διήλθομεν ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν;

“So are we assured that there are two things leading to the πίστις about the gods, which we went through before? (*Laws* 966c and d)

Both of these cases belong to the translation “proof”. In the quote from the *Phaedo*, this is made clear by its juxtaposition to παραμυθία, “argument”. That the translation “faith in the gods” (R.G. Bury for the Loeb edition) for the second part of the passage from the *Laws* does not work we can see in two different ways. Firstly, πίστις in 966d naturally resumes the use of 966c, where it definitely does not mean “belief”, as according to this quote there is considerable (intellectual) activity required in order to get to it. The Loeb edition here translates, rightly in my opinion, “proof”. Secondly, “faith *in* the gods” does not fit with the preposition περί here, which also recalls 966c directly. So, we have to translate 966d “Two things which lead to the proof about the gods” and 966c we should translate more literally “the entire proof about the existence of gods”.

ἄρ’ οὐ πίστεως χάριν, ὅτι τὴν γε ἐν τοῖς φόβοις καὶ ἔρωσι καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ῥάδιον κρᾶσιν ἐπιδείξαι:

“Was it not for the sake of πίστις, because the mixing in fears and loves and in the other things is easy to show.” (*Philebus* 50c–d)

Socrates here is talking about different conditions where a mixture of pain and pleasure can be seen. The one in comedy was discussed by him explicitly, because it was not easy to understand (as stated in 48b). Now, as he points out in 50d, because he has explained the hardest one, we don’t have to explain the easier ones explicitly but can simply take it as proven and continue. “For the sake of the argument” then seems very reasonable.

πίστεις τὰς μεγίστας ἡγουμένω ἀλλήλοιν δεδωκέναι τε καὶ δεδέχθαι,
“believing that they have given and received the biggest πίστεις” (*Phaedrus* 256d)

ὅτε δὲ δικάζειν μέλλοιεν, πίστεις ἀλλήλοις τοιάσδε ἐδίδοσαν πρότερον.
“And when they were about to judge, they first gave one another πίστεις as follows” (*Critias* 119d)

πρὸς αὐτῷ δὲ ἤδη τῷ τέλει ὀρκων καὶ πίστεων καὶ τὸ παράπαν θεῶν μὴ φροντίζειν,
“in the final stage, not longer caring about oaths and πίστεις or the gods altogether,” (*Laws* 701b–c)

All three of these passages have πίστις as a pledge or guarantee, the usage that we see so frequently in Herodotus and which we saw in Gorgias as well. The vocabulary used in the quote from the *Phaedrus* most clearly points in this direction with the “giving and receiving”, whereas the quote from the *Critias* lacks the “receiving” part but is otherwise the same. In the quote from the *Laws* we can infer this meaning from its juxtaposition with ὀρκων “oaths”.

τοῖς δὲ πάντων διαφέρουσιν πρὸς πίστιν ἐντὸς τῆς ἀκροπόλεως περὶ τοὺς βασιλέας αὐτοὺς ἦσαν οἰκῆσεις δεδομέναι.
“and to those who were most exceptional because of their πίστις houses within the acropolis, in the vicinity of the kings, were given.” (*Critias* 117d)

ἅτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἔξωθεν ὑπ’ ἀλλοτρίων τύπων, οὐκ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοὺς ὑφ’ αὐτῶν ἀναμνησκομένους:
“Because of the πίστις of the writing, produced by other characters on the outside, they do not remember by their own capabilities on the inside” (*Phaedrus* 275a)

Although the translation “trust in writing” (H. Fowler for the Loeb edition) in the quote from the *Phaedrus* does not seem unreasonable, nevertheless it remains to be said that, similarly to the eunuchs in Herodotus discussed above, this πίστις is not a quality of the people described but something belonging to the γραφή. The same goes for the *Critias* passage as well.

Finally, note that these three non-philosophical meanings of πίστις are not exclusive, as we find multiple in the *Laws*, the *Critias* and the *Phaedrus*. On the other hand, there are no non-philosophical uses of πίστις in the dialogues where it occurs as a philosopheme, so the philosophical meaning can be seen as exclusive.

5.2 Πίστις as philosopheme: choice of dialogues

One of the hardest parts of discussing Platonic doctrine is the sheer number of written works, which obviously stands in stark opposition to those of his predecessors, which are handed down to us only in citations from commentators of either Plato or Aristotle⁶ on the one hand and doxographers on the other. In the following chapter, because I want to describe his use of πίστις, I will focus on Platonic epistemology and in particular on the division between knowledge on the one hand and belief and opinion on the other. The descriptions of this idea I will take, mostly going from the most abstract to the most concrete descriptions, from the *Meno*, the *Gorgias*, the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*.

5.3 Meno

Although in the *Meno* the term πίστις itself does not occur, the separation of knowledge from true belief in the *Meno* is important for later similar distinctions. The context here is the discussion of the teachability of virtue, which is the question posed by Meno to Socrates in the beginning of the dialogue. This discussion is perhaps most famous for its argument that the collection of knowledge involves remembering. Socrates points this out by showing that without actually *teaching* Meno's slave anything, he has more knowledge than before. Although it is not stated explicitly in the text, this idea connects well with later definitions of knowledge versus something else (as well as Parmenidean epistemology), since if knowledge is involved with remembering, this means that knowledge can only be of unchanging things (the Ideas).

Socrates distinguishes knowledge from true belief with the following analogy (*Meno* 97a–c): One does not need to be knowledgeable (φρόνιμος) in order to guide someone rightly, because when you ask someone the direction, the man with the right opinion, ὀρθῶς δοξάζων, will give you the right direction just as much as the one who knows. Concluding, true opinion, δόξα ἀληθής, is as no less of a leader (ἡγεμών) than φρονήσις, knowledge. Note that, unlike Plato's later more Parmenidean account of knowledge, this still really regards practical knowledge. The problem, however, with opinion, and this statement strongly recalls Gorgias' ideas about δόξα as well, is that they don't stay long (πολὺν δε χρόνον οὐκ ἐθέλουσι παραμένειν, 98a).

In the following line scholars have seen Plato arguing for a definition of knowledge as justified true belief: the way to make an opinion knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) and lasting (μόνιμος) is to tie it down with a reasoning of the cause (δήση αἰτίας λογισμῷ). This, according to Socrates, is the remembering (ἀνάμνησις) they had discussed earlier. How this causal reasoning can be so directly equated with remembering is unclear to me. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato also discusses the idea of knowledge being justified true belief, but the problems of this definition are never overcome and the dialogue ends in typical Socratic aporia. Considering Plato's later rather rigid dichotomy between νόησις on the one hand and δόξα on the other, a definition of knowledge that derives from something on the other side of the dichotomy would not work.

5.4 Gorgias

In the *Gorgias*, albeit from a different perspective, a similar dichotomy to the one in the *Meno* is discussed. Here, Gorgias and Socrates are talking about the definition of rhetoric.

Here, the term πίστις finally comes in. Socrates discusses the difference between *having learned* something and *having believed* something:

πότερον οὖν ταῦτόν δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι μεμαθηκέναι καὶ πεπιστευκέναι, καὶ μάθησις καὶ πίστις, ἢ ἄλλο τι;

Γοργίας
οἶομαι μὲν ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἄλλο.

Σωκράτης
καλῶς γὰρ οἶει: γνώση δὲ ἐνθένδε. εἰ γὰρ τίς σε ἔροιτο: ‘ἄρ’ ἔστιν τις, ὦ Γοργία, πίστις ψευδὴς καὶ ἀληθής;’ φαίης ἄν, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι.
“So do you think that having learned and having believed and a lesson and a πίστις, are the same thing, or something different.?”

Gorgias
I personally think, Socrates, that they are different.

Socrates
“You think right, and you can prove it like this: If someone would ask you” Can a πίστις, Gorgias, be true or false? “, you would say yes, I think.” (*Gorgias* 454d)

βούλει οὖν δύο εἶδη θῶμεν πειθοῦς, τὸ μὲν πίστιν παρεχόμενον ἄνευ τοῦ εἰδέναι, τὸ δ’ ἐπιστήμην;
“So do you think we should posit two forms of persuasion, one providing πίστις without knowing, and the other knowledge?” (*Gorgias* 454e3)

The difference between a μαθήσις and a πίστις is stated as that there is no such thing as a false or a true μαθήσις, but there is a true and a false πίστις.¹⁹ The relevance of this passage cannot be overstated, as it is here that we have πίστις connected both to other forms of the same root and to parallel forms having to do with the verb μανθάνω “to learn”.

For μαθήσις, the translation “lesson”, comes to mind, at least in the sense of “something that has been learned”, as guaranteed by occurrences in tragedy. This would also match the perfects μεμαθηκέναι and πεπιστευκέναι very well. The result, then is that either one is persuaded and ends up with a belief without knowing something, or one ends up with knowledge. From the perspective of the knowledge or belief itself, this distinction makes sense, but if we look at this from the perspective of the audience, a problem occurs: when you have been persuaded, you could *think* you *know* something, even if you were simply provided with a false belief. A counterargument in Platonic terms could be that knowing something can never have anything to do with persuasion at all, because it is *recollection*, not persuasion, by means of which knowledge is acquired.

¹⁹It is interesting to note that although Plato here dissolves the connection of πίστις to the truth that was still felt by Parmenides and Empedocles, but nevertheless in terms that also followers of Parmenides might agree too: perhaps we could go so far in seeing a distinct link to Parmenides’ πίστις ἀλήθης?

5.5 Republic

In Plato's *Republic*, πίστις figures prominently in the allegory of the line, where it is the term for one of the four main divisions (533e–534a).

ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι, ἀποροῦσα δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς τί ποτ' ἐστὶν οὐδὲ πίστει χρῆσασθαι μονίμῳ οἷα καὶ περὶ τᾶλλα,
“Sensing that it is something, but puzzled and unable to adequately grasp what it is nor to experience a stable πίστις like about other things,” (*Rep.* 505e2)

καὶ μοι ἐπὶ τοῖς τέτταρσι τμήμασι τέτταρα ταῦτα παθήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γιγνόμενα λαβέ, νόησιν μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀνωτάτῳ, διάνοιαν [511ε] δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ δευτέρῳ, τῷ τρίτῳ δὲ πίστιν ἀπόδος καὶ τῷ τελευταίῳ εἰκασίαν, καὶ τάξον αὐτὰ ἀνὰ λόγον, ὥσπερ ἐφ' οἷς ἐστὶν ἀληθείας μετέχει, οὕτω ταῦτα σαφηνείας ἡγησάμενος μετέχειν. (*Rep.* 511d–e)

“And, answering to the four sections, assume these four affections in the soul, νόησις to the highest, διάνοια to the second, to the third give πίστις and to the last picture-thinking, and order them according to reason, considering that as much as what they answer to partakes in truth, so they partake in clearness.”

ἀρκέσει οὖν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὥσπερ τὸ πρότερον, τὴν μὲν πρώτην μοῖραν ἐπιστήμην καλεῖν, δευτέραν δὲ διάνοιαν, τρίτην δὲ πίστιν καὶ εἰκασίαν τετάρτην: καὶ συναμφοτέρα μὲν ταῦτα δόξαν, συναμφοτέρα δ' ἐκεῖνα νόησιν: καὶ δόξαν μὲν περὶ γένεσιν, νόησιν δὲ περὶ οὐσίαν: καὶ ὅτι οὐσία πρὸς γένεσιν, νόησιν πρὸς δόξαν, καὶ ὅτι νόησις πρὸς δόξαν, ἐπιστήμην πρὸς πίστιν καὶ διάνοιαν πρὸς εἰκασίαν:

“So will you be satisfied, I said, as before, to call the first part ἐπιστήμη, the second διάνοια, the third πίστις and the fourth εἰκασία: and the last two δόξα and the first two νόησις, δόξα being about generation and νόησις being about essence, and as essence is to generation, so is νόησις to δόξα, and as νόησις to δόξα, so is ἐπιστήμη to πίστις and διάνοια to εἰκασία” (*Rep.* 533e–534a)

The top-level divisions of the line are νόησις on the one hand, everything concerning being, and δόξα on the other, everything concerning generation. Of these two divisions, the top levels are ἐπιστήμη and πίστις respectively. Plato later elaborates this distinction in the *Timaeus*, discussed below. Although πίστις is connected with generation (γένεσις), and as such removed from the path of truth that it was connected with by Parmenides, it is still the highest that we can reach for when it concerns becoming.

τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἄρα σκεύους ὁ μὲν ποιητὴς πίστιν ὀρθὴν ἔξει περὶ κάλλους τε καὶ πονηρίας, συνὼν τῷ εἰδότη
“Of the same implement the maker will have right πίστις about what is good and what is bad because he is together with the one who knows” (*Rep.* 601e)

This analogy of the instrument-maker and the player (τῷ εἰδότη in this quote) to illustrate the difference between right opinion (cf. *Meno*) and knowledge again shows the Platonic use of πίστις as “belief”. Like the connection to μαθήσις in the *Gorgias*, the fact that here πίστιν ὀρθὴν is used as a synonym for δόξαν ὀρθὴν (as used in the *Meno*) proves this particular translation for πίστις. It is no coincidence that we see πίστις used here, however. As discussed

above, for Plato in the analogy of the line πίστις is the equivalent of νόησις or ἐπιστήμη when connected to the physical world. The nature of this analogy and its connection to the *Meno* further shows that although Parmenides and Plato placed it on opposite sides of the truth-opinion division, πίστις in Plato's epistemology retains an objective character: even though it cannot qualify as knowledge per se it can still retain a connection to the objective truth.

5.6 Timaeus: Plato explaining Parmenides?

The cosmology and epistemology described in the *Timaeus* connect directly to the analogy of the line, although there are some simplifications and elaborations.

τοὺς δὲ τοῦ πρὸς μὲν ἐκεῖνο ἀπεικασθέντος, ὄντος δὲ εἰκότος εἰκότας ἀνὰ λόγον τε ἐκείνων ὄντας: ὅτι περὶ πρὸς γένεσιν οὐσία, τοῦτο πρὸς πίστιν ἀλήθεια.

“whereas the accounts of that which is copied after the likeness of that Model, and is itself a likeness, will be analogous thereto and possess likelihood; for as Being is to Becoming, so is Truth to Belief.” (*Timaeus* 29c, translation by W.R.M. Lamb)

ὅταν μὲν περὶ τὸ αἰσθητὸν γίγνηται καὶ ὁ τοῦ θατέρου κύκλος ὀρθὸς ἰὼν εἰς πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν διαγγείλῃ, δόξαι καὶ πίστεις γίγνονται βέβαιοι καὶ ἀληθεῖς, ὅταν δὲ αὖ περὶ τὸ λογιστικὸν ἦ καὶ ὁ τοῦ ταύτου κύκλος εὐτροχος ὢν αὐτὰ μηνύσῃ, νοῦς ἐπιστήμη τε ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποτελεῖται

“and whenever it is concerned with the sensible, and the circle of the Other moving in straight course proclaims it to the whole of its Soul, opinions and beliefs arise which are firm and true; and again, when it is concerned with the rational, and the circle of the Same, spinning truly, declares the facts, reason and knowledge of necessity result.” (*Timaeus* 27b–c, translation W.R.M. Lamb)

This passage, where Timaeus explains the theory of the Forms, is central to the question of Plato's ontology and epistemology. Probably, then, we should see in Timaeus no other than Plato himself, as any historical account of him is solely based on Plato's dialogue. It is in this passage that we find a number of very central connections to Parmenides and Empedocles. The demiurge (cf. Parmenides' goddess in the center of everything, fragment B12, who governs and mixes everything together) makes the world out of the four elements, which of course reflect Empedocles rather than Parmenides. Nevertheless, the sentence cited above seems a clear reference to Parmenides and as I will argue, is in fact an explanation of the way of δόξα in Parmenides: an account of that which is eternal (= Being), is true knowledge. A λόγος of the second, concerned with becoming, can not be true, but can only be εἰκότος. This seems a rather clear reference to the way the Goddess in Parmenides introduces the cosmology: she can only talk about a διάκοσμον εἰκότα “a arrangement possessing likelihood”. The next remark Timaeus makes about the cosmology also seems rather directly inspired by Parmenides: when we write something like this, the most important thing is that it is better than the accounts that are otherwise given.

Here, then, Plato is further systematizing Parmenides' idea and forms yet another argument that although it is clearly not Parmenides' Truth, the way of δόξα does have a relevance. As in the *Republic*, a striking departure from Parmenides' ideas is that πίστις for Plato comes on the other side of the dichotomy: Πίστις explicitly has to do with the category of opinions, but nevertheless it is the type of opinion analogous to ἐπιστήμη “knowledge” when it

concerns the physical world and the highest attainable for this type of object, so it still has positive value.

5.7 Conclusion

As we have seen, Platonic epistemology is firmly anchored in mostly Parmenidean thought. One of the biggest departures from the thoughts of his predecessors and earlier use of the term in Greek in general is the way he employs πίστις. Before Plato, although belonging to the group of words describing persuasion, πίστις always figured on the side of *truth*. In Gorgias, πίστις is not explicitly opposed to truth, but it is much more disjointed from it than before. In Platonic thought, however, its usage in the *Gorgias*, *Republic* and the *Timeaus* shows it firmly established in the realm of opinion. Meanwhile, where it is used more colloquially and less as an epistemological term, this usage conforms to that of authors before him, showing that in general use the term had not really shifted meaning. Speculating on why his πίστις is so different from that of his predecessors, we may identify two possible reasons.

On the one hand, we might think that the Platonic account of learning has had an influence on his use of the word. If truly learning something, as the *Meno* suggests, involves the *recollection* of the soul, there can be no *persuasion* involved in this case. Furthermore, in the *Gorgias* there is another line explicitly drawn between having learned something and having believed something, and consequently between μάθημα and πίστις.

Secondly, it may be significant that between the times of Parmenides' and Empedocles' philosophical activity and those of Plato, the Greek world saw the rise of the art of rhetorics, and as a result persuasion itself also became more of an art than an attribute of truthful things, as the generally more relativistic philosophies of the associated thinkers (Protagoras, Gorgias) show. This might itself be the reason for Plato's dissociation of learning and persuasion, and in connection to that, his shifting use of the term πίστις. Nevertheless, although it is confined to the physical world, the realm of generation, it can still be seen in a quite positive light: as shown in the *Timaeus*, it is the highest thing and the closest thing to truth and knowledge we can get to within this realm, and so at least partly retains the objective character that it had for Parmenides.

Conclusion: the “cycle” of truth and belief

Examining the use of πίστις in early Greek philosophy shows a gradual development on the one hand and a number of abrupt action–reaction turnarounds on the other. Although the etymological connection between πίστις and the other forms of the root πειθ- “to persuade” was always clear, in its earliest use it shows a much closer connection to truth than this connection would lead one to assume. With the rise of rhetorics and the corresponding more relativistic doctrines of the so-called sophists, Protagoras and Gorgias, the art of persuasion also saw growing interest. In Gorgias' writing, persuasion is a main topic, pretty much entirely disjointed from the truth. Interestingly, as far as we can see, πίστις still retains its earlier meaning and the dichotomy between opinion and truth that he describes in both of his extant works sounds very Parmenidean.

When Plato “revived” Parmenides' epistemology with the distinction of knowledge, which has to be connected to Being, and opinion, which does not, πίστις as a philosophical term for him obviously lost its connection to the truth. Where it is not used

as a philosopheme it is similar to earlier use in Herodotus or even contemporary use in Xenophon and Isocrates. The term πίστις as a philosopheme, having lost its earlier connection with truth, for Plato takes the meaning “belief”, which as far as I can tell is neologistic, but clearly etymologically justifiable. On the other hand, “belief” as our modern concept is not a perfect translation either, as it figures in Plato’s new epistemology, which, significantly, takes a number of existing terms in the Greek language and gives them a new meaning. This is typical for Plato’s dealing with language, which always takes the language as it is as a starting point, whereas Aristotle later will make much more use of neologisms for his philosophical vocabulary.

The cycle of truth and belief mentioned in the title of this section can be seen in the development of early Greek philosophy as well, although the term πίστις is unaffected until Plato. Parmenides is generally seen as the great innovator in Greek philosophy, but he is reacting to earlier Ionian natural philosophers on the one hand and Xenophanes on the other and starts the cycle that more or less keeps on going. Xenophanes denies knowledge of anything outside of the physical world; Parmenides denies knowledge of the physical world. Empedocles rehabilitates the senses and the physical world; Gorgias uses the Parmenidean distinction but relies on the practical use of δόξα to the exclusion of knowledge, Plato revives the Parmenidean distinction, again excluding true knowledge of the physical world but nevertheless maintaining a relationship between the two and placing them on a scale. Thus, this study of πίστις also shows that we should be careful in thinking of early Greek philosophy as a series of great revolutions. Rather, much like Aristotle’s teleological description of it, every thinker relies heavily on that which was written before him. Similarly, regarding Gorgias in particular and the sophists in general, we should be careful to view them in their proper place in the paradigm, rather than looking at them primarily through Platonic glasses.

Of course, the cycle does not end with Plato. With Aristotle and the beginning of the scientific method, man was again invested in finding out the eternal truth. With Christianity, belief in the transcendent, backed by neo-Platonic ideas, was again dominant. From the Renaissance on, the scientific method regained its popularity and was firmly established as Western societies were secularizing in the twentieth century. Perhaps now we find ourselves on the verge of another twist, as the “belief” in “facts” and “experts” among the population lowers again, accepting politicians as accepting “alternative facts”. This in turns makes for a more polarized society, as people are basically communicating across paradigms. If the history of Greek philosophy can be any help in a case like this, maybe here it can remind us that no matter our view on truth or belief, we still have more things shared than not.

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Appendix: Corpus study of πίστις

In order to show the regular uses of the word πίστις up to Plato, I have looked at the occurrences of the word in Herodotus, the Tragoedians and Isocrates, as well as all the philosophers treated explicitly in the thesis. I looked at the standard Loeb translation through the online Loeb classical library for each occurrence, as well as, in cases where the translation doesn't match up well with the rest of the uses, whether or not the context clearly supports this translation.

Aeschylus

Persae 443: "loyalty"

Sophocles

Electra 735: "confidence"*²⁰

Electra 887: "proof"

Oedipus Tyrannus 1420: "claim to confidence"

Oedipus Tyrannus 1445: "belief"*²¹

Trachiniae 588, 590: "Promise of success"

Trachiniae 623: "Assurance"

Trachiniae 1182: "Pledge"

Philoctetes 813: "Pledge"

Oedipus Coloneus 611: "Loyalty"

Oedipus Coloneus 950: "trust"*²²

Oedipus Coloneus 1632: "Pledge"

Euripides

Medea 22: "Assurance"

Medea 414: "Oath"

Medea 492: "Respect"*²³

Medea 731: "Promise"

Hippolytus 1037: "Assurance"

Hippolytus 1055: "Sworn testimony"

Hippolytus 1309: "Firm bond"*²⁴

Hippolytus 1321: "Confirmation"

Supplices 627: "Hope"

Electra 737: "Credit"

Helena 578: "Proof"

²⁰In Orestes' race, τῷ τέλει πίστιν φέρων is translated as "confident in the result", which misses the mark: the point is not that he was "confident in the result" but that he was keeping back, knowing that in the end, a lot can still happen, and it's safer to keep back for most of the race than to rush forward.

²¹Creon is going to consult the oracle and instructs Oedipus that he must also τῷ θεῷ πίστιν φέροις, translated "believe the god". That this is the case seems unlikely from the context however: Oedipus himself says that by the earlier oracle, he should be allowed to perish. Nevertheless he will consult the oracle. Although I have no better translation of my own to offer, I remain skeptical of "belief" here.

²²Discussed in the main part of the thesis.

²³ὄρκων, said of Medea to Jason. Could be in the category of either "trustworthiness" or "assurance"

²⁴ὄρκων, cf. *Medea* 492.

Phoenissae 365: “Trustworthiness”
Iphigenia Aulidensis 1586: “Belief”
Rhesus 415: “Pledge”

Herodotus

The two starred attestations are discussed in the main part of the thesis.

3.7.7, 3.8.1, 3.8.6, 3.8.9, 3.8.11: “Pledges”
3.9.1: “Pledge”
3.70.1: “Trust”*
3.71.3: “Pledges”
3.74.8: “Pledge”
4.172.19: “Pledges”
7.145.5: “Pledge”
8.105.9: “Trust”*
9.91.8, 9.92.2, 9.106.22 “Pledge”

Isocrates

10.22: “Assurance”
10.40: “Pledge”
11.31: “Proof”
11.37: “Evidence”
15.256 “Arguments”
15.278 “Argument”
15.280 “Persuasion”
16.40: “Loyalty”
17.11, 19: “Pledge”
17.44: “Guarantee”
18.25, 30, 46: “Pledge”

Total numbers

Although the above is by no means an exhaustive corpus, the numbers show a clear picture: of the 56 attestations, 36 or 64,3% clearly fall into the pledge/proof category. On the other hand, only 5 or 8,9% are translated as “trust”, “faith” or “belief” and for most of these a different interpretation can be argued. These numbers show that the latter translation is at best a marginal meaning of πίστις at the time of Plato.