Abstract: The aim of this essay is to examine an aspect of Parmenides’ poem which is often overlooked: the psychological grounds Parmenides uses to construct his view. While it is widely recognized by scholars that following Parmenides’ view requires addressing mental activity, i.e. both the possibility of thinking the truth, as well as thinking along the wrong path that mortals follow, a closer examination of the psychological assumptions involved have, to my knowledge, not yet been attempted. I argue that by identifying and analyzing the psychological vocabulary in his poem, it is revealed that Parmenides was a keen observer of human mental behavior. Through these psychological (perhaps “cognitivist,” following some recent categories) observations of thought processes, Parmenides gains insight into the structure of thought itself. The outcome of this inquiry reveals three notable conclusions: First, the poem contains a remarkably extensive use of strictly psychological vocabulary. Second, the presence of this psychological material and the lack of scholarly attention to it means there is a significant aspect of Parmenides intellectual
legacy that remains unexplored — Parmenides as psychologist, keen observer of human mental behavior. Furthermore, the recognition of this material helps shed important light on Parmenides’ philosophical message. Ultimately, I intend to provide an exhaustive treatment of Parmenides’ psychological language, which requires close examination of DK B 1, 2, 6, and 7. Due to spatial constraints, I have divided the inquiry into two parts, and will only address DK 1-2 below.

Keywords: Parmenides, Eleaticism, Presocratics, ancient epistemology, ancient psychology.
Fragment 6

I continue my discussion of Parmenides’ psychological observations with a close examination of Fragment 6, as arranged by Diels-Kranz (DK)¹:

χρὴ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐδόν ἐμεναι· ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι, μηδὲν δ’ οὐκ ἔστιν· τὰ σ’ ἐγὼ φράζεσθαι ἕκωγα. πρώτης γὰρ σ’ ἀφ’ ὀδοὺ ταύτης διζήσιος < >, 2 αὐτάρ ἐπειτ’ ἀπό τῆς, ἣν δὴ βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν πλάττονται, δίκρανοι· ἀμηχανίη γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν στήθεσιν ἰθύνει πλακτὸν νόον· οἱ δὲ φοροῦνται κωφοὶ τυφλοὶ τεθηπότες, ἀκριτα φύλα, οἷς τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταύτὸν νενόμισται κοὶ ταύτων, πάντων δὲ παλίντροπος ἐστι κέλευθος.

As with the entirety of Parmenides’ enigmatic poem, there are numerous interpretative difficulties contained within this fragment, and various scholarly perspectives drawn from them. Most notable here is the question of whether DK 6.1-3 are referring to a possible “third way of inquiry,” which would seem inconsistent with the exhaustive dichotomy introduced in DK 2. My own view is that the imputation of a “third way” is a mistake, one which has been definitively rejected by Cordero’s arguments against the unfounded conjecture of Diels – great German philologist that he was – at the end of DK 6.3.³ Nevertheless, such philosophical details are not my concern in this inquiry, but rather the evidence for Parmenides psychological perspectives. In translating this fragment, I employ the same technical meaning (“cognitive operations) for the verb νοεῖν and its cognates, as was established in my treatment of DK 2 in Part I of this inquiry.