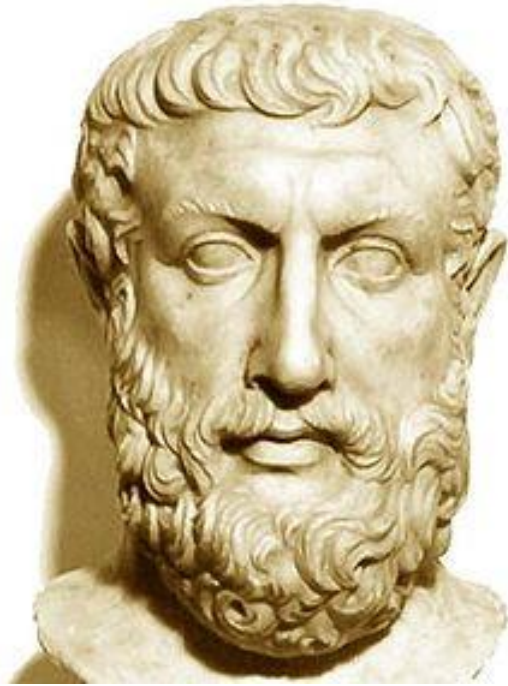




## Parmenides of Elea (b. 515 BCE)

The Poem of Parmenides (*On Nature*) is traditionally divided into three sections:

-The Proem (B1)

-Truth (B2-B8.49)

-Mortal Opinions (B8.50-B19)

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The proem tells the story of a young traveler who proceeds along a road (possibly the path of Truth itself) to the house of the (unnamed) goddess.

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The route is “far from the beaten path of humans.” The goddess welcomes the traveler and says that the traveler will learn all things: both Truth itself, as well as how things *appear* (i.e. mortal opinions.)

Truth(B2)

---

The goddess proceeds in B2 to identify two possible “routes for thinking.”

Truth(B2)

The First is:

‘\_\_\_ is’

That is, what *exists*. We’ll call what exists *Being*.

# Truth(B2)



The other possible route for thinking turns out not to be possible after all: “it is not” or generally

‘\_\_ is not’

Thinking about *non-being* is not merely incorrect; it is **not even a possible way to think**, according to Parmenides.

It is a “path entirely unable to be investigated” (B2.6)..

# Being

For Parmenides, because we cannot say of anything that

“\_\_\_\_\_ is not”

No sentence of that form is even really thinkable. This fact has certain (strange!) consequences, described in B8.

# Being is:

-ungenerated  
(i.e. it didn't  
come from  
anywhere)

-imperishable  
(it isn't going  
anywhere)

-whole

-of a single kind

-complete

-has no past or  
future (i.e. time  
doesn't exist)

-doesn't have  
any parts  
(B8.22)

-not divisible  
(B8.22)

-unchanging  
(B8.26)

-is the same  
thing as thinking  
about being (B3)

# Time, Change, and Difference

Being is all that there is. (Since it is the only thing we can think about.) Now this means, that **there is no change** at all; and there can be **no such thing as difference**, either. Why not? Because if I want to describe a change, I'll have to say something like:

(1) "Before, it was not \_\_\_\_\_, now it is \_\_\_\_\_."

(2) "Before, it was not here."

or even

(3) "Before, it was not now."

(4) "In the future, it will not be now."

# Time and Motion

---

(3) and (4) are just trying to tell us that there is such a thing as time passing (which seems pretty obvious to us). But is it possible to say what things *are not*? Not according to Parmenides. So ... **there's no such thing as time passing, and there is (therefore) no *change*.**

---

And, **there's no *motion*.** To describe a motion, you'd first need time (which we've already ruled out), and also you'd have to say about a thing that it *is not* (wherever it is supposedly moving to.)

# Monism

This means that, if you can't have difference, and you can't have change, that there can be *only one thing*. (Because if you had two things, you would have different things.)



So, for Parmenides, *there is only one thing*.  
Namely, Being.

# Discussion Question

Parmenides thinks that it is impossible to think about *nothing*. Do you agree?

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While Parmenides' view (Monism) looks quite strange, he gives *arguments* for it.

---

An *argument* is an arrangement of statements such that some of the statements (the *premises*) support a *conclusion*.

# An Example Argument

If it is raining, the road will be wet.

It is raining.

The road will be wet.

Here the statements above the line are the *premises*, and the *support the conclusion* that “The road will be wet.” Notice that in this case, that, if those premises are true, the conclusion *has to be true*.

# Parmenides' Main Argument Against the Generation of Being

If being was generated (i.e. came from somewhere) then non-being exists.

Non-being is impossible.

Being wasn't generated.

*ex nihilo nihil  
fit*  
(from nothing,  
nothing comes)

If there were non-being, only non-being  
could have come from it.

There is being.

So there wasn't non-being.

## *Reductio ad absurdum*

This argument looks like an instance of a *reductio ad absurdum* (reduction to absurdity):

Assume  $P$

From  $P$  follows a contradiction or impossible consequence

$P$  must be false.

# Zeno of Elea (born c.490 BCE)

Zeno was a follower of Parmenides who gave argument which supposedly demonstrated that motion is in fact impossible. Zeno's arguments (sometimes called Zeno's *paradoxes*) will be instances of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments in the following way:

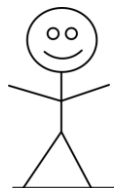
Assume that there is motion.

If there is motion, absurd consequences follow.

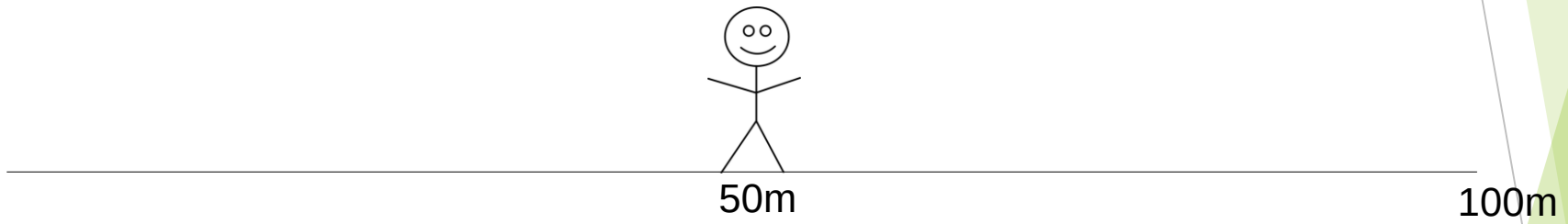
There isn't motion.

# The Dichotomy

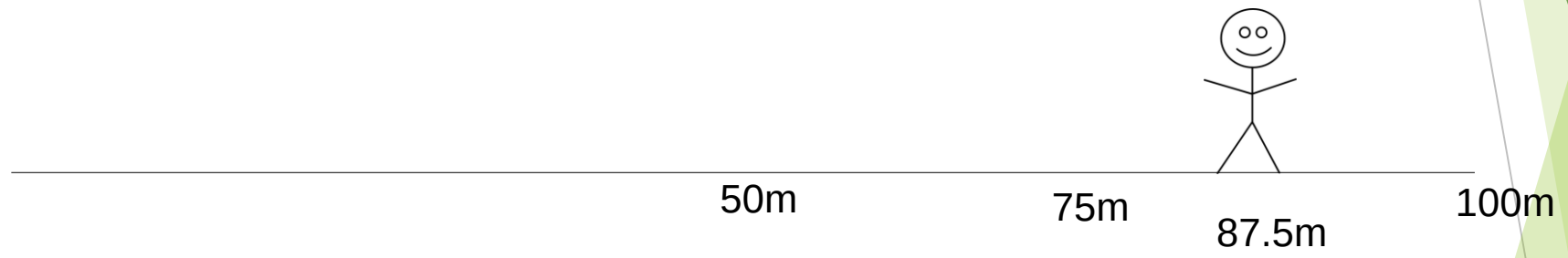
1. Assume that object  $a$  is moving towards endpoint  $p$ .
  2. First, object  $a$  must travel half the distance to  $p$ .
  3. Then, object  $a$  must travel half the remaining distance to  $p$ .
  - ....
  - $n$ . Then object  $a$  must travel half the remaining distance to  $p$ .
  - $p$ . But, 2 through  $n$  is infinite.
  - $q$ . So object  $a$  must complete an infinite list of tasks in a finite time.
  - $r$ . But  $q$  is impossible.
- Motion is impossible

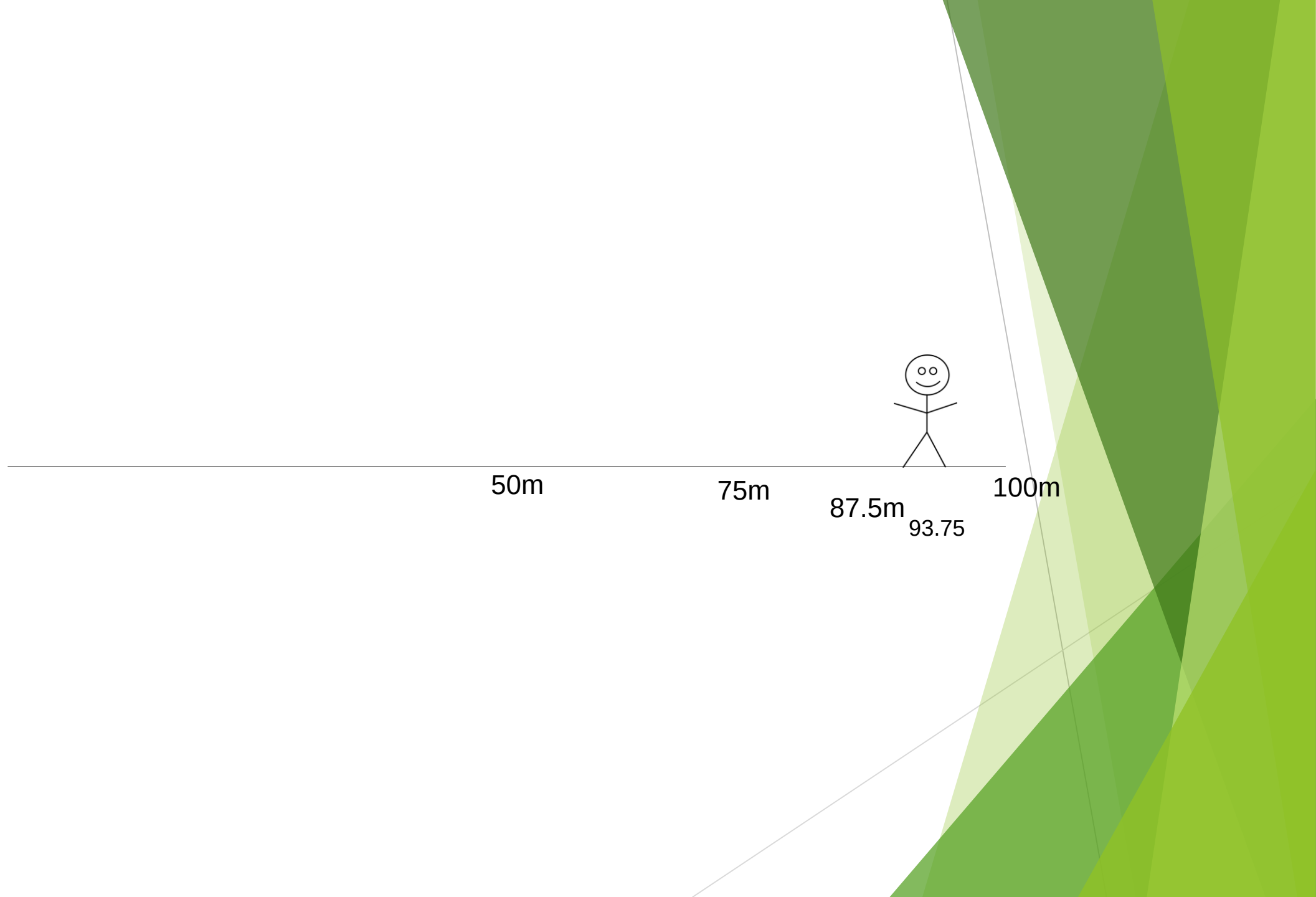


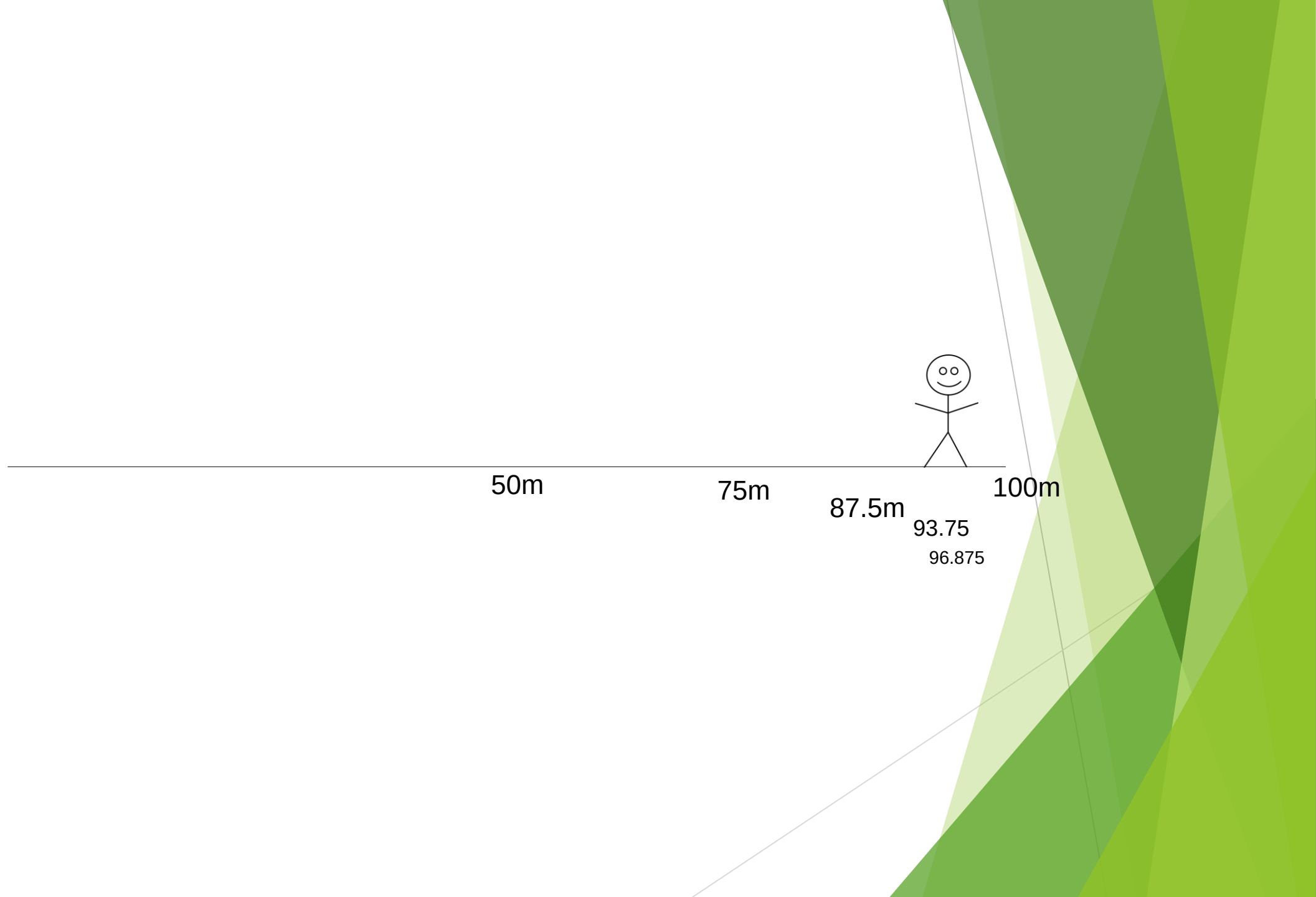
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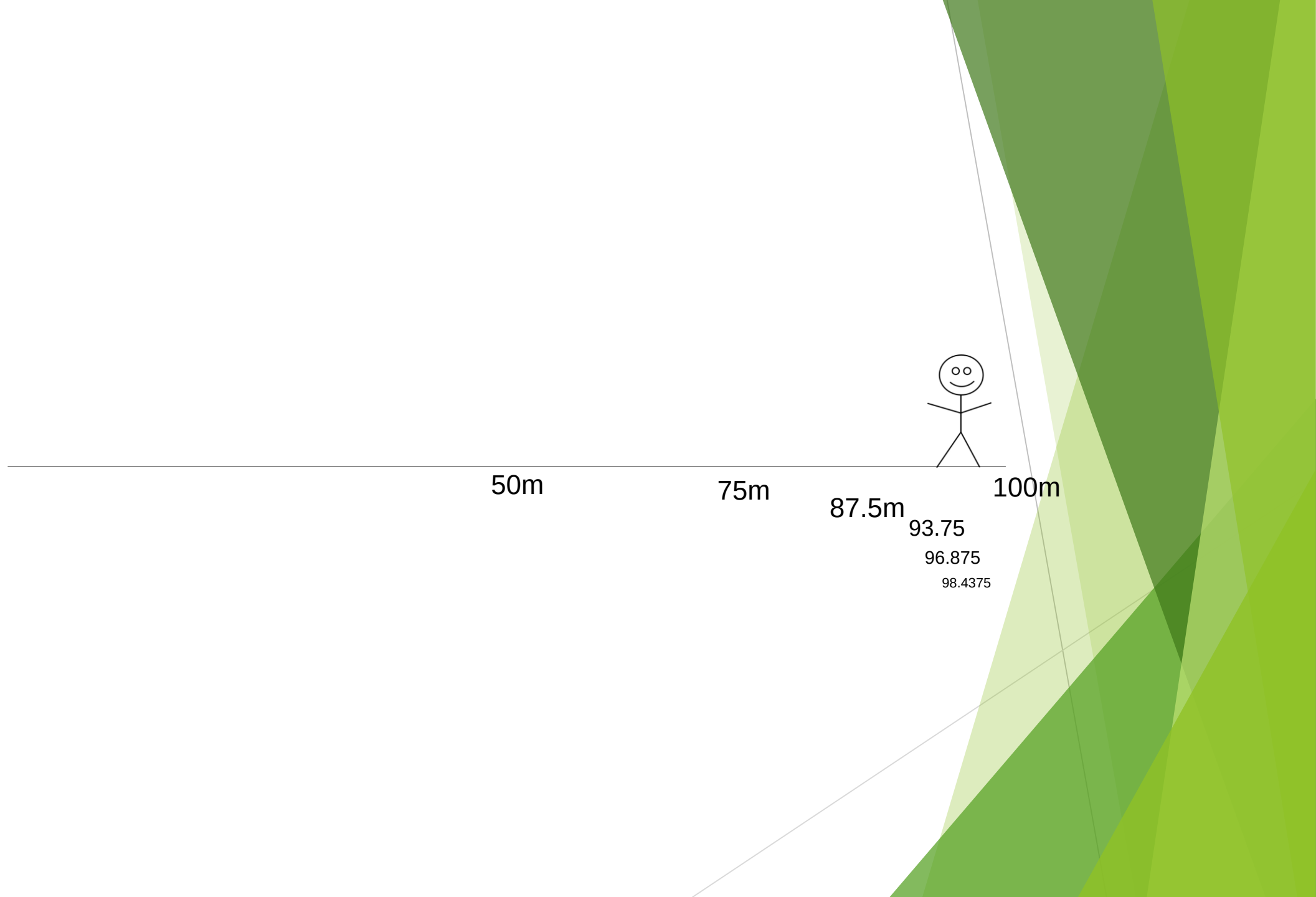




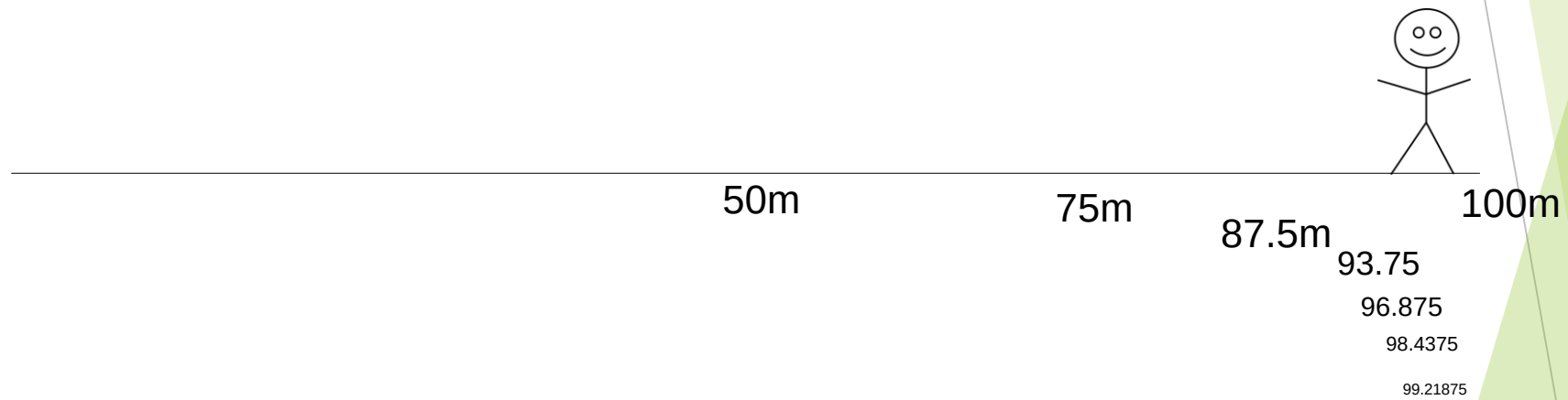








# and so on ...



# Mohist “School of Names” Version of the Paradox

“The “School of Names” (ming jia) is the traditional Chinese label for a diverse group of Warring States (479–221 BCE) thinkers who shared an interest in language, disputation, and metaphysics.” (Fraser 2017)

They had their own version of this paradox (although it is not explicitly about motion).

Mohist  
“School of  
Names”  
Version of  
the Paradox

**Take a one foot stick.  
Then every day,  
remove half of what  
remains.  
There will always be  
something left.**

# So Motion Is Impossible?

One reply to Zeno's argument is Diogenes' refutation: silently walking. Which supposedly demonstrates that motion *is* possible.

This won't satisfy a Parmenidean however, as they admit that things aren't like they appear to be. Instead we need a refutation that uses *reason* to demonstrate that something is wrong with the argument.

# Discussion Question

Explain either Zeno's paradox or the Mohist "School of Names" Paradox.

Then, give a solution to the paradox you've chosen (if one exists!)