

# Eleatic School

1      Eleatic school takes its name from Elea, a city in southern Italy, the hometown of Parmenides. Philoso-  
2      phers of this school think that change is impossible and unthinkable. Although the found of the school  
3      is attributed to Parmenides (515 BC-?), the thesis of permanence could be seen in works of Xenophanes  
4      (570 BC-478 BC).

## 5      1      Xenophanes

6      Nowadays, Xenophanes' argument about God is often referred as criticism to superstitions. He wrote:  
7      *Yes, and if oxen or lions had hands, and could paint with their hands and produce works of art as men*  
8      *do, horses would paint the forms of the gods like horses and oxen like oxen. Each would represent with*  
9      *bodies according to the form of each. ....So the Ethiopians make there gods black and snub-nosed; the*  
10     *Thracians give theirs red hair and blue eyes.*

11     However, the major point of Xenophanes is that God is of unity, while mortals think that the gods are  
12     born as they are, and have perceptions like theirs, and voice and form. God is one, eternal and unlike  
13     mortals in both mind and form. He sees all over, thinks all over, hears all over and governs all things by  
14     the thought of his mind. He is unlimited because nothing is beside him, while he is limited because he is  
15     a perfect form, not a formless infinite. He is immovable as a whole, because motion is in contrast with  
16     his unity, but there is motion or change in his parts. God is the eternal principle of the world, so God is  
17     the world.

18     Xenophanes invites an eternal God, who is the first principle of the world and governs everything.  
19     However, he is interested in reducing God to the level of the forces of nature instead of explaining  
20     everything as the will of God and do offer some scientific theories. For example, from evidence of shells  
21     and imprints of sea products in stone, he infers that at one time the earth was mingled with the sea, but  
22     in the course of time it rose above the sea.

## 23 2 Parmenides

24 Parmenides challenges Heraclitus' teach that nothing is permanent. If change is possible, it means that  
25 things are and are not. That is impossible, for a thing cannot both be and not be. So change is impossible.  
26 There is also another line of argument: If being has become, it must has become from being or become  
27 from non-being. The latter is impossible as being cannot become from nothing, while the former means  
28 that being has become from itself, which is equivalent to saying that being is identical with itself, and  
29 thus has always been.

30 Since change is impossible, everything remains what it is. Hence, there can be only one eternal,  
31 underived and unchangeable being, because if the being is plural, motion, the change of positions is  
32 inevitable. Since being is one, it must be continuous and indivisible because there is not anything in it  
33 but being. There is no break in being, for if there is, the break itself would become being, going against  
34 the doctrine that being is one. So again being is continuous. Furthermore, being must be immovable, for  
35 there is no empty space, non-being, for it to move in. It is also because of the doctrine that change and  
36 motion is impossible. Besides, thought and being are one, for what cannot be thought, cannot be; and  
37 what cannot be, cannot be thought.

38 Since change is inconceivable and being is one and permanent by reasoning, how are we supposed to  
39 understand the phenomena of change and motion observed by our senses? The answer is: our senses are  
40 cheating us. The world of sense is just an illusion and we should believe in our reasoning firmly.

41 Parmenides might be a victim of the linguistic fallacy as pointed by Betrand Russell. During change,  
42 things first are and then are not. Therefore, change does not require a thing both be and not be. Also,  
43 existence of change does not require being become from being, which preassumes being is one. Perhaps  
44 the main lesson we could learn from Parmenides is a negative one. We must be careful with the language  
45 we use when reasoning and deducting, for it may cause confusions and mistakes.

## 46 3 Zeno

47 Zeno (490 BC-430 BC) is famous for his four paradoxes led by the possibility of motion. The first one is  
48 that one can never reach a goal from a start point because he must passing through the infinite number  
49 of points. The second one is about Achilles of great speed and the tortoise. The intelligent runner cannot  
50 reach a tortoise because in any interval of time, when he is moving from his start point to the tortoise's  
51 start point, the tortoise has moved a certain distance. The third is known as the paradox of the moving  
52 arrow. When an arrow is flying to its target, at any given moment, it is in a definite position in space,  
53 *i.e.* it is at rest. As a result, it can never reach its goal. It is implicated in the first three paradoxes that

54 time and space are discrete instead of being continuous. The last one paradox is about relative motion.  
55 The observation of motion could be different, depending on whether it is observed from a position at rest  
56 or moving at different speeds.

57 Zeno also proofed that plurality is impossible because it leads to contradictions in a more general way  
58 compared with his paradoxes. If the whole being is plural, it is made up of many parts. It would lead  
59 to such a contradiction. The whole being is infinitely small, because any totality of being can be divided  
60 to infinitely small parts, and the sum of infinitely small parts can only be infinitely small. On the other  
61 hand, the whole being is infinitely large, because any totality can always be added with other parts to  
62 make it larger. Therefore, the being is one.