

Ben Russell

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### Parmenides and Aristotle

When the world presents itself to us, we are confronted with what seems to be constant motion and multiplicity. Our experience of the world is intimately tied to the passage of time, which carries with it inherent change and movement. We also perceive a number of different physical objects, separate and distinct from one another. In many of his writings, the Greek philosopher Parmenides put forth a different paradigm. He posited that change and multiplicity were an illusion, and that the true nature of Being is singular and static. His argument stemmed from one fundamental presupposition: Being cannot come from non-being, and non-being cannot come from being. His claims were powerful, and they rocked the foundations of traditional philosophy at the time. After his arguments came to the forefront, old schools of thought became subject to Parmenidean scrutiny, and if one wanted to make a metaphysical claim about the nature of Being they would have to grapple with Parmenides in order to do so. In Aristotle's *Physics*, we get a different picture. Aristotle accepts the principles of both change and plurality as real and valid, seemingly flying in the face of Parmenides. In this essay, I will outline the arguments of both Parmenides and Aristotle as related to change and plurality, and analyze how Aristotle is able to salvage change and plurality. I will also discuss where Aristotle diverts from Parmenides and where there is overlap.

In order to understand Aristotle's response to Parmenides, we must first understand Parmenides. As mentioned before, the argument rests on this premise: 'being cannot come from non-being, and vice versa'. Parmenides asserts that this premise leads to the rejection of plurality and change. The argument against plurality goes as follows: Imagine you have two distinct objects, A and B. A is not B, and B is not A. If A is not B, then A occupies a space as a non-being (not-B) and a being (A). To say that a being is a non-being is to say that what is, is not. The argument against change goes much the same way. Imagine Thing A can change into

Thing B. Since A has not become B yet, it occupies a 'non-being' space since it is a non-B. Non-beings changing into beings violates our first premise. The only way our presupposition can be satisfied is if A and B are one and the same.

If there is no change and no plurality, it is impossible to conceive of a universe in which things can come in and out of being. In order to settle this issue, when Aristotle began the *Physics*, he attempted to illustrate the fundamental principles of coming to be. The example he uses is that of a non-musical man becoming musical. Aristotle demonstrates that when G comes to be F, there is something of G that remains and something that disappears. That which remains in G is that which was not contrary to F, and that which disappears is that which F contradicts. "One thing that comes to be remains, and one does not remain. The thing that is not opposite remains, since the man remains, but the not-musical thing, or the unmusical thing, does not remain." (38). From here, Aristotle asserts that 'what comes to be' is always composed of a subject and an opposite. "This latter thing is of two sorts: either the subject or the opposite. I mean, for instance, that the unmusical is opposite, and the man is subject." (39). Here Aristotle is showing that the thing coming into being is a composite of both the subject and the privation of the opposite. Since the unmusical is opposite, the privation of unmusical becomes the means to transition G to F. For an unmusical man to become a musical man, he must destroy the unmusical part of him, but his 'man-ness' remains. This is why the subject is constant through change, but the opposite disappears.

The Parmenidean would object at this point. Though Aristotle has provided a framework for how coming into being occurs, he still has not explained how it is possible to get being from non-being. How does a non-musical being become musical without violating Parmenides? The solution is nested in the aforementioned compound nature of things. A being can possess a number of qualities and identifiers, some which relate to one another and some which do not. For example, a nonmusical man is a non-being in the sense of musicality, but a being in the sense of being a man. "We speak in the fullest sense of a doctor acting on something or being

acted on, or coming to be something, from being a doctor, if it is insofar as he is a doctor that he is acted on in this way or produces these things or comes to be these things. So it is also clear that coming to be from what is not signifies this: coming to be from it insofar as it is not.” (41). Aristotle’s argument is that Parmenides did not see objects as the compound things they really are. When the unmusical becomes musical, it is not something coming from nothing. Rather it is something coming from something, since the underlying subject possesses being. The unmusical thing becomes musical ‘from what it is not’ only insofar as it is unmusical, but there is still something that ‘is’ underneath. Parmenides believed that an object possessing both being and non-being implied a contradiction, but with this argument Aristotle diverts from that assertion.

Aristotle also suggests that every object is a compound of matter and form, the matter being the physical material that makes up the object, the form being its organizational and functional structure. In human beings, for example, the matter is the human body and the form is the soul. Within this framework, Aristotle draws a distinction between potentiality and actuality. He asserts that matter has the potential to be organized into a number of forms, and it is when it organizes into a certain form that it becomes actualized. For example, cloth can be spun into a number of different things, but the cloth in your shirt was used for the purposes of making a shirt. The cloth is the matter with potentiality, the shirt is the actualized form. When the cloth moves from matter to form, this unveils a movement from A to B, and another means by which Aristotle fights the Parmenidean problem. “We say that Hermes is in the stone, and the half-line in the line, because they are in it potentially, and that what is unripe is grain because it is grain potentially.” (149). By introducing the concept of potentialities, Aristotle has allowed for B to be present in A. Since B comes ‘from what A is not’ only insofar as A differs from B, then the only ‘not-being’ elements left in A are those that are not present in B. Potentiality allows for even these characteristics to exist as ‘being’ within A, thus defending even further against Parmenides.

Despite the fact that Aristotle contradicts Parmenides' conclusions, he does not contradict all of his premises. Aristotle accepts the premise that being cannot come from non-being and non-being cannot come from being, which is the cornerstone of Parmenidean thought. By drawing attention to the compound nature of objects, Aristotle was able to beat Parmenides. Parmenides treated different objects as though they were simples, and that the statuses of being and non-being were mutually exclusive. Aristotle, however, recognized that different types of being and non-being can be present in the same object due to their compound nature. Using this argument, Aristotle was able to reconcile the appearances of change and plurality with the teachings of Parmenides.