
ἀρχαί

AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL
THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

ARTIGO | ARTICLE

The gap between Parmenides' argument on Being and his cosmology in the Aristotelian account

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CONTE, B.L. (2023). 1 The gap between Parmenides' argument on Being and his cosmology in the Aristotelian account. *Archai* 33, e-03325

Abstract: In some of the Aristotelian accounts, Parmenides' thesis is construed in opposition to the philosophy of nature; on the other hand, he is also depicted, in a different context, as a cosmologist, to whom the Stagirite (and a long tradition afterwards, ending with Simplicius) ascribes a theory of becoming and its principles. In this paper, I exhibit and analyse the relevant passages from *Physics* I 1-3,

Metaphysics I 3 and 5 and *On generation and corruption* I 3, providing an interpretation that aims to solve the apparent paradox, making sense of the information we can gather from Aristotle's and Simplicius' testimonies. Eventually, I propose a construal of the Two Ways of fr. 2 with an emphasis on the predicative reading of *einai*, which could hint at the Parmenidean approach to cosmology that runs in parallel with the argument on Being.

Keywords: Parmenides, Eleatism, Aristotle, Monism, Cosmology.

The poem and its “parts”

It might seem like a given for the study of Parmenides to present his poem divided into two main parts after a Proem. In effect, there is no doubt – for Sextus Empiricus so informs us when transmitting these verses – that the poem begins with some sort of autobiographical fiction, the account of the journey of the “man of understanding,” who, accompanied by the Daughters of the Sun, goes to the encounter of a nameless goddess, who gives some sort of revelation. It is precisely this speech given by the goddess that, we presume, constitutes the rest of the poem, which most interpreters divide into two parts. The first, dedicated to the argument on being, is entitled Truth (*Aletheia*), whereas the second part, which is connected to a cosmological discourse, is assigned to Opinion (*Doxa*). As there is no doubt throughout the poem about the opposition between Truth, faithful saying (*pistos logos*, B8.50), on the one hand, and the opinions of mortals (*doxai broton*), which are devoid of truth (B1.30), on the other, it seems quite natural that the cosmological propositions written in the poem (or at least some of them)¹ should be regarded with caution, as statements to which the

¹ This stance that in the poem there are cosmological propositions identifiable to “opinions” is present even in authors who have insisted on the need to consider that there are at least some cosmological propositions conveyed by the poem that are

Parmenidean goddess would not be committed. Although it is a trend among the most recent investigations on Parmenides to reassess the cosmological, astronomical, and biological doctrines conveyed in the Poem in a positive light, it is worth noting that even the recent edition of the testimonies and quotations collected by Laks and Most continues to reproduce this preconceived dichotomous scheme that is depreciative of those doctrines, when they present, after printing the 66 verses of fragment 8, the title “Fragments and testimonies concerning the second part of the poem: the opinions of mortals” (Laks; Most, 2016, p. 553).

This widely accepted representation has a serious drawback: it does not seem to correspond to some important information we can glean from our doxographic sources, notably (but not only) from Simplicius. In addition, for our particular interests in this exposition, such a representation ends up making Aristotle's interpretation of our Eleatic thinker difficult to understand. In effect, the division of the Poem into two parts, Truth and Opinion, and the association of the latter with cosmology, has a identifiable date of birth: Fülleborn's (1795) edition introduces the dichotomous scheme, adopted by Brandis (1813) and then by Karsten (1835) (cf. Cordero, 1987, esp. p. 8-15). This scheme is uncontested by subsequent editors and endorsed by Diels and Kranz's edition of *The Fragments of the Presocratic Philosophers*.

We can already find in Zeller a consequence imputable to this scheme of dichotomous division, subsuming the cosmological contents under the sign of the *Doxa*: for this author, the doctrines expounded under this title would be “hypothetical”, foreign to Parmenides but reconstructed by him through a proto-dialectical procedure, with the didactic and controversial purposes of refuting them (Zeller, 1869, p. 491). Diels saw in this controversial stance the essence of a historical Eleatic school, in dispute with Pythagoreanism. The so-called *Doxa* was a false theory, an object of

evidently true, such as e. g. the claim that the Moon revolves around the Earth (B14). Such is the case for Cordero (2010).

critique as the application of a method: the *Aletheia* is the canon to which everything is referred in terms of being and non-being, while the *Doxa*, thus understood, is akin to the punching bag on which young athletes exercise themselves (Diels, 1887, p. 250).

Despite the authority conferred by Zeller and Diels on the “hypothetical-controversial” interpretation which continues to dominate the debate, it is remarkable that a long tradition from the earliest reception of Parmenides to Simplicius, and even modern interpreters who did not come to know Fülleborn’s edition (e.g., Tiedemann (1791)) acknowledge a set of cosmological (cosmogonic) statements which they attribute to Parmenides with no hesitation. Plutarch explicitly states that the Eleatic philosopher would have spoken “profusely about the Earth, the Sky, the Sun, the Moon and the stars,” and that he would have recounted “the origin of humans” (*Adv. Colotem*, 1114 b-c). The sources recounting from Aetius’ lost work attribute to Parmenides statements such as that the stars are condensations of Fire (DK 28 A39); that the Sun and the Moon were originated by separating from the Milky Way (DK 28 A41); that atmospheric air is a vaporization of that which had been condensed in the formation of the Earth; or that the Sun and the Milky Way are predominantly igneous in nature, while the Moon is a result of the combination between fire and air (DK 28 A37) (refer also to the fragments B10 and B11, which introduce the themes of the origin of stars, as well as the distribution of the universe in regions named Ether, Sky, Milky Way).

But it is Simplicius who gives the most important testimonies, because they include quotations from the poem, making it possible to confirm not only (a) the existence of a set of cosmological doctrines attributed to Parmenides, but also (b) the existence of that which this tradition interprets as a “doctrine of contrary principles,” which they also attribute to Parmenides. *This* doctrine, more so than the entirety of the Parmenidean cosmology, is what seems to be identified by the doxography through expressions such as *en tais pros ten doxan*, which refer to something like a “section” of the poem, thus titled

Doxa.² In addition, Simplicius attributes the identification of this theory in the Parmenidean passage to Aristotle, for, as we shall see next, he is concerned at the occasion with commenting on the statement that, for Parmenides, the principles are opposites (*Phys.* I 5, 188a20-22).

Third, and finally, (c) the Neoplatonic commentator textually indicates the passages he seems to designate as corresponding to the *Doxa* section: vv. 53-59 of fr. 8. with the 4 verses of fr. 9 – and these verses only. Thus, the *Doxa* is not a “second part” of the poem, far from it; it is rather a transition to the cosmology per se. In the so-called *Doxa*, commentators such as Simplicius still see, based on Aristotle, a theory of the contrary principles, which, as we said, they attribute to Parmenides. We would like to demonstrate how, in the testimonies of Aristotle himself, it seems possible to confirm that he too acknowledges such a theory, which coexists with the argument about being in Parmenides. Finally, we will propose an interpretation of the *Doxa* passage and a reconstruction of the Parmenidean paths of investigation that seem to us to be compatible with Aristotle's and Simplicius' reports.

Thus, we shall take a quick look at two important passages in Simplicius that attest both to the existence of a Parmenidean cosmology and to a “deflated” version of the *Doxa*, the content of which is not properly cosmology, but the aforementioned theory of principles. What is interesting in these testimonies is that they provide information that is independent of Simplicius' exegetical-philosophical project – which consists in incorporating in a very conscious manner the Parmenidean doctrines into the Platonic metaphysical scheme of a sensible/intelligible dualism. That is, in

² Theophrastus. *Physic. op.*, 3.2 (= Simpl. *in Ph.*, 25.14): καὶ τῶν πεπερασμένας [τῶν δὲ πλείους λεγόντων... ἔθεντο τῷ πλήθει τὰς ἀρχὰς] οἱ μὲν δύο ὡς Παρμενίδης ἐν τοῖς πρὸς δόξαν πῦρ καὶ γῆν (ἢ μᾶλλον φῶς καὶ σκοτὸς)... Alex. Aphr. *In Metaph.*, 670.21: Π. δὲ ἐν τοῖς πρὸς δόξαν πῦρ καὶ γῆν [οὐσίαν καὶ ἀρχὴν ἐτίθετο]. Them. *in Ph.*, V, 2, 17,29: καὶ γὰρ ὁ Π. ἐν τοῖς πρὸς δόξαν τὸ θερμὸν ποιεῖ καὶ τὸ ψυχρὸν ἀρχάς. Philorop. *in Ph.* 22.2: ὅτι ὁ Π. ἐν τοῖς πρὸς δόξαν πῦρ καὶ γῆν ἔλεγεν εἶναι τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν πάντων. 126.1: ἐν τοῖς πρὸς δόξαν δύο λέγειν τὰς ἀρχὰς, ἐν τοῖς πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἓν εἶναι λέγοντα.. Cf. Conte (2020).

these passages, Simplicius gives us purely textual indications about the organization of the themes in the Parmenides' Poem aside from his Platonizing interpretation.

T1:

He shows that the principles are contraries, that is, the elementary foundations of physical things, firstly from the agreement among almost all the natural philosophers, even if they disagree in other respects. For even those who say being is one and unmoved, as for example Parmenides, even these people make the principles contraries of physical things. For even he [= Parmenides] in the verses with regard to opinion (*en tois pros ten doxan*) makes hot and cold principles. Those things he calls 'fire' and 'earth' and 'light' and 'night' or 'darkness'. For he says after the verses regarding Truth: (B8.53-59) and immediately afterwards: (B9.1-4) (Simplicius. *In phys.*, 179.27-180.12 (tr. H. Balthussen et al. (2012), modified))

T2:

... having completed the argument concerning what really is and being about to explain the sensible things, (P.) says: (B8.50-53). Having completed the ordering of the sensible things, he then says: (B19.1-3) (Simplicius. *In de caelo*, 557.3-558.10)

In T1, Simplicius assigns to *Doxa* a theory that postulates opposing principles, indicating its multiple expressions as Fire and Earth or Light and Night, which are interpreted as reducible to the canonical (Aristotelian) opposition between hot and cold. It is important to note the positive, positivizing, theoretical character with which Simplicius characterizes the set of verses he designates with the title *Doxa*.

By continuing to follow Simplicius' lead, we see that in T2, a passage from the commentary on *De caelo*, he seems to effectively distinguish between *Doxa* and the broader context of a *Diakosmesis*. Whether that term makes reference to the poem itself (*diakosmos*

occurs at B8.60),³ or whether it is simply part of a crystallized cosmological vocabulary, what is relevant in this testimony is that it confirms the circumscription of a small set of verses that seems to have been given considerable attention by the commentator on Aristotle, a set that more appropriately corresponds to what is referred to by the title “*Doxa*” both in this and in other doxographers, and which is limited to vv. 53-59 of fr. 8. with the 4 verses of fr. 9.

Aristotle's critique of the monistic argument

The double presentation of Parmenides given by Aristotle can, nevertheless, cause perplexity. While in the first argumentative moves of his *Physics* he criticizes the Eleatic argument about being, in the same work the Stagirite emphasizes that Parmenides would have something important to say in favor of the thesis that principles are contraries, a statement that is an object of Simplicius' commentary. This statement seems to be effectively the one that is at the origin of the doxography that identifies a *Doxa* section in the Poem, that is, the *locus* that could support this statement. In Aristotle's reconstructions, Parmenides is, therefore, *both* someone who has contributed with explanatory theories of becoming, *and* someone whose doctrine must be criticized for the sake of carrying out the project of *Physics*.

Because of this double presentation, which might seem contradictory, it is necessary to delimit the scope and the effects of the critique of Parmenides and of the Eleatic monism in the context of the book I of *Physics*. For Aristotle's project, it is not simply a matter of elaborating some kind of discourse on nature in an unqualified sense, but of establishing the ontological and epistemological foundations, that is, the principles of a science of nature (*peri physeos episteme*, 184a14-15). In this context, he tells us, by referring to the Eleatics: “to investigate whether ‘what is’ is

³ If it does make reference to the word in the Poem, the testimony would make a case for an anaphoric reading: *diakosmos* in B8.60 designates the opposites named in the preceding verses (as already saw Cornford (1933), p. 108).

one and immobile is not to investigate about nature” (184b25-185a1). Well, the object of physical science are natural entities, *physei onta*, defined as those endowed with the principle of movement and rest. It is therefore assumed that moving beings – as such – exist, if there is ever to be a physical science, just as one must assume a given set of axioms if one is to study geometry (185a12-17). In this regard, Aristotle would attack the Parmenidean description of being as immobile, “unengendered,” “imperishable,” etc. But it is according to the determinacy of unity that the Eleatic thesis becomes even more profoundly problematic, insofar as ‘Eleatic’ monism leads to the undesirable consequence of obstructing a differentiation between what is a principle and that of which it is a principle: “Indeed, says the Stagirite, there is no principle, if (what is) is unique (“*hen monon*”) and one (“*hen*”) in this way” (185a3-5). Eleatic ontology or, more precisely, the argument that all that is is one is thus an impediment to the theory of science as such; and, particularly, to the enterprise of physical science, which ought to elaborate the principles of beings in such a way as to explain their abilities to change: substratum, form, and privation, at first formulation; and, later, according to the more finished theory of substance as a unit of matter and form.

According to Aristotle, for there to be physics, there must therefore be an elaboration of ontology as a theory of substance. The Eleatic argument, despite not dealing with nature in its original context, indirectly produces aporiai that affect the philosophy of nature (I 2, 185a17-20), in the sense intended by the Stagirite, which is: as a science founded on ontological principles. Thus, Aristotle, in his critique, seeks nothing from Parmenides’ physical-cosmological discourse; it is, aside from that, the argument concerning being (the One) that raises problems for his own project, at once physical, ontological, and epistemological. So we have the following situation: 1) the Parmenidean cosmological discourse – as those of other predecessors – can only seem to Aristotle, after all, something like an ‘unscientific’ physics, as a result of the *Aristotelian* theoretical assumptions and, in particular, his demand for an ontology of natural entities; 2) however, the Parmenidean argument about being –

detached from any function it might have had originally in the Poem with respect to cosmology – receives attention on account of the philosophical problems that Aristotle is interested in solving, in order, precisely, to elaborate the ontology upon which he constructs his physical science. Hence, from now on, and particularly in the *Metaphysics*, the Stagirite is compelled to present Parmenides' philosophy under two aspects (thesis of the One, on the one hand; thesis of cosmological principles, on the other). There is no need to presume that the Stagirite misunderstands what he reads in the Poem, but rather to note that he draws from the work two themes that will interest him, in his own philosophical elaborations, for different purposes, in different argumentative contexts, and with different evaluative perspectives: there is definitely an angle that is more critical with respect to the thesis on being; but not that this stance precludes some theoretical and philosophical recognition when dealing with the cosmological principles (the methodological procedure that establishes them is even praised, as we will see later).

Reconstruction of the argument in *Physics* I 3, 186a22-b14

T3:

Against Parmenides the same way of arguing holds, besides others exclusive to himself. The resolution (*he lysis*) consists in saying that he assumes what is not true and infers what does not follow. His false assumption is that being is said absolutely (*haplos*), when it is said in many ways. As for the invalidity, (i) suppose we say that there are only pale things, and that 'pale' means only one thing: the pale things will be none the less many and not just one. The pale will not be one in virtue of being continuous, nor will it be one in account. For the being of pale will be different from the being of that which has received it. Even if nothing existed separately except for the pale: it is not because they can exist separately, but because they differ in their being, that the pale and that to which it belongs are different.

This, however, is something Parmenides did not get far enough to see. (ii) He must make it a premise, then, not only that 'is' means only one thing, to which it would be predicated, but that it means precisely what is, and precisely one. For that which supervenes is said of some underlying thing, so if 'is' supervenes, that on which it supervenes will not be, for it will be something different from that which is; and therefore, there will be some which is not. It will not be possible for precisely what is, then, to belong to something else. For it cannot be something that 'is', unless 'is' means more things than one, such that each [viz. something and the One] is a sort of being, and it was laid down that 'is' means only one thing.

(iii) But now, if precisely what is does not supervene on anything else, but rather supervene on it [viz. the One], why does 'precisely what is' mean 'is' more than 'is not'? Suppose precisely what is to be itself and pale, the being of pale is not precisely what is (for being cannot even supervene on it, since nothing is a thing which is except precisely what is): it will follow that that which is pale is not. And I do not mean that it will not be this or that: it will not be at all. But then precisely what is will not be: for it was true to say 'that it was pale', and that meant something which is not. So 'pale' also must mean precisely what is. But then 'is' will have more than one meaning. (Arist. *Ph.* I 3, 186a22-186b14 (tr. W. Charlton (1970), modified))

The passage I 3 186a22 ff. (T3) from *Physics* is of particular interest, one that has recently received attention from interpreters. It is worth noting Gabriella Rossi's precision regarding Aristotle's procedure (announced in 184b25-185a20): it is not here a matter of an *elenchos* in the sense of a refutation of the Eleatic thesis, but of analyzing and resolving its assumptions (cf. *lyein logon eristikon*, 184a8; ROSSI (2006), p. 91-97). Arguments like those of Parmenides and Melissus, which are false inferences (*pseudos syllogizontai*), must only be resolved by eliminating that in virtue of which (*par'ho*) the false arises; it is a matter of understanding the premise, pointing out that which leads the argument, not by accident, to arrive at some false conclusion.

The analysis, therefore, explains what causes the conclusion to be false (*SE* 24, 179b23-24; *Top.* VIII 10, 160b23-25; cf. 160b33-37;

cited by Rossi (2006)). In the particular case, Aristotle intends to show the mistake in the premise, which he attributes to the Parmenidean argument, that what is is stated “in a simple manner” (*haplos*, 186a24-25). Simplicius recounts this formalization of the Parmenidean argument by Eudemus, which seems pertinent: “what is apart from being is not, and being is said only in one way; being is therefore one” (*to para to on ouk on, alla kai monakhos legetai to on. hen ara to on, in Ph.*, 115, 11-14). But how exactly are we to understand this problematic assumption? The interpretation one gives to it determines what kind of monism one understands Aristotle attributes to Parmenides. There is one interpretation according to which some kind of plurality would not be excluded: if “being” is there understood as some sort of common property shared by all existing things. A ‘substantial’ rather than a ‘numerical’ monism could be drawn from verses such as B8.22-25, which insist on the indivisibility, homogeneity, and continuity of “what is”. The Parmenidean thesis would imply a universe “all full of being,” with no regions of nonbeing, yet that would not exclude the diversity of things that are.⁴ The opening of the passage, with the so-called “whiteness analogy” (i), would appear to support this interpretation at first, yielding the following reconstruction: “if only white things were assumed, and if white meant something unique, not least there would be many whites, for white would not be one, neither by continuity nor by definition.” If this were a direct comparison for reconstructing the Parmenidean argument, plurality would be admitted in one of the premises of the analogous argument: “only white things are; white means one thing; white things are one.”

However, the first part of the text seems propaedeutic, not committed to immediately producing an argument analogous to Parmenides’ (or so I would like to propose). It aims to show that, in white things, there is a difference between being-white (*toi leukoi einai*) and the white thing (*to leukon*), or, more generally, between property and property-bearer. It is easy to spot the difference in the

⁴ This is the Parmenidean monism interpretation that Clarke (2019), p. 95-96, extracts from Aristotle’s report.

white things example (let us say: a white table, a white chair, a white wall, etc.) because in this case they are countable things, discontinuous in space, easily identifiable. But it is not clear that it is a matter of substituting “white” for “entity” to get the monistic argument. Parmenides apparently does not intend to say that there is a sense in which all things are (as in saying that all things are white), but something even stricter: that all things “are” in only one and the same sense, therefore “what is” is only one thing, viz. that there is only one item that can rightfully bear the name “being.”

Aristotle seems to reconstruct this stricter version of calling being “absolutely” (*haplos*) by arguing that “what is” would not only mean one thing, but “precisely what is” (*hoper on*), from (ii) onwards. On this condition, it is a matter of showing that the distinction between property and the property-bearer would be abolished. “Being-white” is not recognized as a proper predicate, since it is not “what is” (cf. iii). In the eyes of Aristotle, not only any substantial difference between things would be abolished by the Eleatic theory, but also the possession of any property, even the possession of any property that would authorize us to say that “what is” is something determined (a problem Parmenides was unaware of, says the Stagirite).

But the doctrine is attacked by Aristotle to the extent – and only to the extent – that it eliminates the existence of principles. Aristotle sees in the Eleatic argument a restrictive conception of being that fails to acknowledge properties as entities. In the context of *Physics*, this becomes problematic on account of the philosophical project of treating natural things as entities (endowed with capacities for change), in which the substratum is a property-bearer, so that form and privation can be predicated of it.⁵

Beyond the context specific to the argument in *Physics* in defense of principles, Aristotle sees no problem in the Eleatics admitting

⁵ This point is correctly observed by Clarke (2019), p. 46-47. Much earlier, Bäumker (1886), p. 551-552, formulated a similar point in terms of the inability to differentiate attributes and substratum.

other items into their ontology. It is the Stagirite who is in need of a different, more complex conception of being to properly approach natural entities *as entities*. For this reason, the argument could indeed not be a dialectical refutation or *reductio*, but an analysis (*lysis*) of the conception built into one of the argument's premises: Parmenides would never admit any plurality of items *as entities*, for he only admits this designation to that one item which is unique within the framework of his ontology: "what is" (*to eon*).⁶ Those plural items – be they properties, be they property-bearers – considered in their particularity are not 'beings' in the sense reserved by Parmenidean ontology to the One.

For this reason, I would submit, Parmenides often avoids the plural participle *eonta*. In the prologue, he speaks of *dokounta* (B1.31), which could be translated as "things purported to be". In the fragment 19, which probably concludes the cosmogony, or in the fragment 9, which speaks of the principles of individual concrete things, these are indicated only by demonstrative pronouns ("these and those things" are denominated from Light and Night; "these things" (*tade*) came to be "for the opinion," *kata doxan*). Remarkably, the plural participle of the verb to be appears, in the surviving fragments, only in a negative expression, when the goddess enunciates the famous interdict: that "non-beings" shall never be allowed "to be" (*einai me eonta*, B7.1)! It is quite possible that such "non-beings" are precisely the concrete things named by mortals, and in doing so they make a mistake, for they transfer to such things properties that speak only of the unique Parmenidean being.

Parmenidean monism would appear to admit plurality, after all, under the condition that nothing 'is' individually, except for "what is," the collective singular fact of being. Indeed, only "what is" can

⁶ Thus, Clarke is not correct when he understands that because "the Eleatics turn out to be committed to the existence of other entities besides their one being" this would make radical monism impossible (p. 46, 2019). In my reading of the Aristotelian passage, the Eleatics are not committed accepting a plurality of 'beings', since the whiteness analogy is not a reconstruction of the Eleatic monism.

be characterized in a determinate and stable way, through the *semata* of fr. 8: “unengendered,” “imperishable,” “whole,” etc.

A strong predicative interpretation of the statements in the ways of fr. 2 would indicate that the First Way captures this unique item of Parmenidean ontology: there is only One that can ‘be,’ that is: be permanently identical to all those predicates (B2.3: *hos esti* Φ), and in such a way that it is impossible in any occasion not to be each and every one of them (*te kai hos ouk esti me einai* Φ). All the other items of reality “are not,” in the sense that they do not possess their determinacies under a similar condition. A double, radically uneven ontology: on the one hand, there is a single item that is named being (*to eon*); on the other, an infinity of items which motivate the wandering of mortals that do not even deserve the name of ‘beings.’ In effect, an ontology that is certainly *not suitable* for underpinning a physical science – as Aristotle’s project is – and that, from the point of view of this project, might perhaps not meet our expectations when we talk about ‘ontology.’

Reports about the Parmenidean theory of principles in Aristotle

Let us now turn to the testimonies in which Parmenides is depicted beyond the monism which Aristotle (perhaps with some reason) revealed to be quite problematic. We read in the *Metaphysics*:

T4:

Now those who at the very beginning set themselves to this kind of inquiry, and (i) said the substratum was one, were not at all dissatisfied with themselves; (ii) but some at least of those who discussed the One – as though defeated by this search for the second cause – say the One and nature as a whole is unchangeable not only in respect of generation and destruction (for this is a primitive belief, and all agreed in it), but also of all other change; and this view is peculiar to them. (iii) Of those who said that all is one, then none succeeded in discovering a cause of this sort, except perhaps Parmenides, and he only inasmuch as he supposes to

be not only the One but also in some sense two causes.
 (iv) But for those who make more elements it is more possible to state the second cause, e.g. for those who make hot and cold, or fire and earth, the elements; for they treat fire as having a nature which fits it to move things, and water and earth and such things they treat in the contrary way. (Arist. *Met.* I 3 984a25-984b8 (tr. W. D. Ross, modified))

In *Met.* I, Aristotle pursues the developments of the investigation of causes in the predecessors. After gathering expressions of material causality (water in Thales and in the ancient cosmogonies, air in Anaximenes and Diogenes of Apollonia, fire in Hippasus and Heraclitus, the four elements in Empedocles, the homoeomeria in Anaxagoras), he seeks some expression of efficient causality, and whether there is one or a greater number of causes of generation and corruption in their totality (984a20). Although in this case it is relevant to classify by the number of principles, it seems that the most fundamental criterion that organizes the exposition is the differentiation between types of causation. If so, the first and poorest position is one of strict “materialism” (T4, i), with no trace of any distinctive type of causality other than material causality. Causality is recognized in that “from which” things are; in this register, such a position can be described as a “material monism,” which postulates the existence of a unique, fundamental substratum.

Well, Aristotle characterizes the group of Eleatics as those who “speak in some other way,” who do not postulate the One so as to generate from it, “as from matter” (*hos ex hyles*, 986b15). Subsequently (ii) Eleatic monism appears, in a very general designation,⁷ as a radicalization of the unity of the substratum. This conception of the One, however, no longer serves as a causal explanation or principle for anything (cf. *Phys.* I 2, 184b21-185a4); it subverts the very meaning of the investigation of causes (which is the way Aristotle interprets what his predecessors would have been seeking), and in this sense the so-called Eleatics are “vanquished” by it.

⁷ Or maybe specifically targeted at Melissos?

Against this background, Parmenides' name is explicitly mentioned – in (iii) – as an exception. Beyond the conception of the One (unique and immobile, *Physics* I 2, 185a3) typical of the rubric “Eleatic,” Parmenides would have said something that the Stagirite allows himself to interpret as a trace or at least a tentative outline of a conception of efficient causality. A surprising statement, given the developmentalist context, for it may indicate that Parmenides is the first, according to Aristotle, in whose thought this kind of causation might be identified!

The description informs where to find it in the context of the Parmenidean work, with mention of Fire and Earth. If the Stagirite expresses reservations (cf. *plen ei ara Parmenidei*, “except perhaps by Parmenides”), it is certainly not because he questions the attribution to Parmenides of the two aforementioned causes or of a cosmological doctrine, but that a theorization of the efficient cause, in a proper sense, can be drawn from this context. I believe that here Aristotle contrasts Parmenides' theory with other theories, indicated in (iv), where the causal role of some of the elements is better differentiated.

Since the early reception there was a debate as to what exactly Aristotle understands as an efficient cause (or something close to an efficient cause) in the passage from Parmenides: for Alexander, Clement, and perhaps Theophrastus, it would be Fire or Light; Simplicius argues that it would be the cosmic divinity of fr. 12, the one “who governs all things.”⁸ The hesitation of the ancient commentators reflects the ambiguity of Aristotle's note: by mentioning Fire and Earth, was he indicating that we should look for something such as an efficient cause (a) in the section of the *Doxa*, with the postulated principles precisely (as the formers seem to understand it), or rather, (b) in the broader cosmological context, subsequent to the initial postulation of the principles in the *Doxa*

⁸ Simplicius. *in Ph.* 38.24-39.16. Alex. Aphr. *in Metaph.* 31,7-16 = Theophrastus. *Phys. dox.*, fr. 6 = *Doxographi Graeci* 482. For McDiarmid (1953), p. 121 the identification to Fire would go back to Theophrastus; but see Journée (2014), p. 18-19.

section (as Simplicius argues), perhaps with mention of a cosmic divinity “who governs all things”?

Whether the two elements are mentioned as a direct expression of efficient causality, or they merely serve as an indication of the textual context in which causality should be looked for, it matters that the reports coherently distinguish the two contexts (monistic argument and cosmological doctrine), with an added detail: Aristotle, in the passage in question, seems to be careful enough not to commit himself to the statute of the two causes, which is lost in some translations.⁹ Well, there is no interpretation of the Eleatic One as a cause or principle in this passage (nor anywhere else in Aristotle's work). On the contrary, the Stagirite argued in *Physics* that the Eleatic One blocks the very conception of principles. Rather, one must read the adverb with *einai*: Aristotle says that Parmenides postulates that “somehow” (*pos*) such causes “are”. This is thereby a reserve clause concerning the ontological statute of causes.

This reserve could be interpreted in two ways: (a) as a warning, by the Stagirite, that his reconstruction is not accurate and is to be read with a grain of salt; or (b) that there would be, in the Poem itself, some reason why an attribution of “being” to both causes should not be taken at face value. It seems to me that the latter is the case, and that *pos einai* warns us of the difficulty in equalizing the ‘being’ identified with the One, on the one hand, to the existence of the aforementioned causes, on the other. They cannot ‘be’ as Parmenides intends only *to eon* to be. What is interesting to observe is that the caveat vanishes in the following mention of Parmenides in *Met.* I 5, where instead a better qualification of the contrast between the One and the causes is presented. The postulation of these causes is linked to some context of theorizing on sensation:

T5:

⁹ Garcia Yebra (1982), for example, reads *pos* with *hen*: Aristotle would claim that “no sólo un elemento, sino dos, en cierto modo, son causas”.

Parmenides seems in places to speak with more insight. For, claiming that, besides what-is, no non-being should be considered, he thinks that of necessity that which is is One and the other is nothing (on this we have spoken more clearly in our work on nature). Then, being forced to follow the phenomena (*anankazomenos d' akolouthein tois phainomenois*), supposing not only that the One exists formally, but also that there is more than one thing according to our sensations (*kai to hen men kata ton logon pleio de kata ten aisthesin hupolambanon einai*), he now posits two causes and two principles, calling them hot and cold, i.e. fire and earth; and of these he ranges the hot with what is, and the other with what is not. (Arist. *Met.* I 5, 986b27-987a2 (tr. W. D. Ross (1924), modified))

The contrast between the two contexts is described in T5 without Aristotle implying any contradiction; there is no linguistic mark of clear adversative value (or so it seems to me), particularly in the sequence *kai... men... de...* What indeed seems astonishing is the association of Fire and Earth with “being” and “non-being”. But the perplexity is resolved, I believe, if we examine a passage from *On Generation and Corruption* which explains the association (the *Metaphysics* passage being then a very abbreviated account of Parmenides’ theories). Let us see.

The “analytics of becoming” in GC I 3

Aristotle indicates here the problem of distinguishing between coming-to-be (something determined) and generating, or coming-to-be *simpliciter*. The problem seems to lie in the fact that in everyday language we often seem to describe the absolute generation of things in a sense that is physically and cosmologically impossible (e.g. as an *ex nihilo* emergence).

T6:

Now we often divide terms into those which signify a ‘this somewhat’ and those which do not. And (the first form of) the distinction, which we are investigating, results from a similar division of terms. For it makes a

difference into what the changing thing changes. Perhaps, e.g. the passage into Fire is 'coming-to-be' unqualified, but 'passing-away-of-something' (e.g. Earth): whilst the coming-to-be of Earth is qualified (not unqualified) 'coming-to-be', though unqualified 'passing-away' (e.g. of Fire). This would be the case on the theory set forth in Parmenides: for he says that the things into which change takes place are two, and he asserts that these two, viz. what is and what is not, are Fire and Earth. Whether we postulate these, or other things of a similar kind, makes no difference. For we are trying to discover not what undergoes these changes, but what is their characteristic manner.

The passage, then, into what 'is' not except with a qualification is unqualified passing-away, while the passage into what 'is' without qualification is unqualified coming-to-be. Hence whatever the contrasted 'poles' of the changes may be – whether Fire and Earth, or some other couple – the one of them will be 'a being' and the other 'a not-being'. (ARIST. *On Generation and Corruption*, I 3, 318a36-14 (tr. H. H. Joachim, 1984))

In T6, Aristotle takes as his starting point an analysis of everyday language with respect to “coming-to-be” and “ceasing-to-be” (Algra, 2004, p. 116–121; Rashed, 2005, liv ff.) The point that seems to interest Aristotle concerns a theory in which expressions are explained by a polar scheme, in which the terms are not indifferent: there is “coming-to-be” moving from the least to the most determined; there is “ceasing-to-be” moving from the most or least determined. Determinateness is a feature of Aristotle's own concept of *ousia*, but this conception is not yet present nor presupposed in this passage. Equally absent here is the conception of *genesis* within the category of substance, which does not admit contraries.

Well, this reconstruction of the language abuses committed by mortals was registered by the goddess at the end of fragment 8:

T7:

Of it, all the names will be, which mortals have established, confident that they are real, “coming to

be” and “perishing”, “to be” and “not to be”, and to change their place changing their color. (Parm. fr. 8.38b-41)

Being is the utmost referent of what mortals name, without knowing it; their language, inclined to the becoming, conceals the reality of the only stable entity. Thus, Parmenides is a precursor to this kind of analysis of language that deals with becoming, which Aristotle, in his own way, develops in *GC* I 3. The goddess mentions mortals’ erroneous linguistic uses. Well, in the previous text, T6, Aristotle, by associating hot with “being” and cold with “non-being”, reconstructs not the goddess’s argument about what is, but her analysis of mortals’ linguistic usage. This is justified because in his *Physics* Aristotle had already criticized and rebuffed Parmenidean “ontology”. What he acknowledges as something of philosophical interest, nonetheless, is the theoretical, dialectical or proto-dialectical procedure of exposing the way in which language is produced among mortals for talking about things in the process of becoming and ceasing to be. If this is indeed so, the mention that Parmenides, who would have spoken about “two” (δύο), seems to be referring textually to δύο γῶμαίς B8.53, precisely in the verses preserved by Simplicius where the *Doxa* exposition begins.

The Parmenidean *Doxa*

T8:

Therewith I put a stop for you to my reliable discourse and thought about reality; from this point apprehend the human beliefs, hearing the deceptive order of my sequence of words. Because, whilst naming according to two perspectives (*dyo gnomais onomazein*), they established Forms (*morphas katethento*) of which none is necessary (wherein men have gone astray), and they discriminated opposites in body and assigned them marks separate from one another, on the one hand aetherial fire of flame, being mild, immensely light, the same with itself in every aspect insofar as not the same as the other; that, on the other hand, being likewise in itself the opposite, unintelligent night, a dense and heavy body. I tell you all things in accord to

this arrangement, in such a way that never shall any mortal outstrip you in judgement. (Parm. fr. 8.50-61 (tr. A. H. Coxon; McKirahan (2009), modified))

T9:

But since all things have been named light and night, and these [have been applied] according to their powers to these things and to those, all is full of light and obscure night together, of both equally, since for neither [is the case that] nothing shares in them. (Parm. fr. 9 (tr. Furley; Gallop, 1991))

In the *Doxa* (T8, T9), the goddess postulates the contrary principles, Light and Night, instantiated in a variety of pairs of opposites. The opposition seems to make explicit the polarity of becoming, which the language of mortals expresses (erroneously) in terms of “being” and “non-being.” As other interpreters (esp. Pulpito, 2011) have also noted, one must distinguish here between these principles and the *morphai*; but, beyond that, acknowledge that such *morphai*, in regard to becoming, correspond to the superficial level of everyday language. As we read that mortals have “established” (*kathetento*) such forms in B8.53, we can see the same event described in B8.39: through naming (*onomata*) they cause “coming-to-be and perishing, being and also not” to be true. One must distinguish between the goddess’s citation of expressions employed by mortals, with which she is evidently not committed, and the cosmological principles she names and that underpin her cosmology:

expression	authorship
“to be born” and “perish”, “to be” and also “not-to-be” (B8.40)	mortals
“flame glow”, “dark night” (<i>morphai</i> , B8.56-59)	mortals
Light and Night (<i>arkhai</i> , B9)	goddess
these things (τάδε... κατὰ δόξαν, B19.1 = the present universe)	goddess

The “flame” in the *Doxa* passage exemplifies the case of a “form” that has determinacy (fire/hot/light) and that, in losing it

(becoming night/cold/dense), loses the predicate that establishes its identity – and it “necessarily” loses this identity (which is much in accordance, we shall soon see, with the expression in the second path of investigation in B2.5b: *chreon esti me einai*). Well, that which has no determination is not identifiable, it ‘is’ not absolutely, and so is unknowable – that was the argument in fragment 2.

If this is so, we could construct the two paths of investigation in fragment 2 in terms of two possibilities, two ‘regimes’ of predication:

B2,3: That x is Φ , and that it is not possible for x not to be Φ

B2,5: That x is not Φ , and that it is necessary for x not to be Φ

This construction assumes that the absence of a complement for the verb *eimi* in the first hemistichs of vv. 3 and 5 suggests (as Mourelatos, 2008, pp. 70–71 argued) a placeholder in a sentence-frame for open possibilities of predicates (here indicated by the Greek letter Φ).¹⁰ The absence of a grammatical subject, which yields strangeness both in the translations and in the Greek text, could suggest logical quantification (Wedin, 2014, p. 79).

The First Way captures that single item of the Parmenidean ontology that is given the name “being,” *to eon*. Its predicates are those with which the subject is completely identified (imperishable, unengendered, whole, homogeneous), so that, in the case of being, it cannot not be any of these predicates demonstrated in fr. 8.

To the Second Way corresponds a complement to Parmenidean ontology, according to the refusal that any other item besides being can truly be said ‘to be’. For everything that ‘is’ not any of Being’s predicates there applies a consequence expressed in modal terms in the second hemistich: “it is necessary not to be” (*chreon esti me*

¹⁰ I depart from Mourelatos’ position in that we could in principle simply read the ‘is’ of predication in both Ways. My interpretation would not be incompatible though with “speculative predication” (but this latter reading could only be applied to the First Way).

einai). But what is the modal value of this expression? This question cannot be easily dismissed with the charge of being anachronistic (*chreon esti* has some modal value, even if we translate it as 'ought', with a sense of appropriateness).¹¹ It cannot, I would suggest, be a strong, purely 'logical' necessity expressing the fact that something is not the case at any given time, but some weaker form: for something necessarily not to be implies that something is not (or ceases to be) at some (undefined) future time.¹²

If this could be accepted, our reconstruction seems to provide the grounds of the goddess' criticism of mortal opinions. I say that "this is a table," that "at this moment it is day," that "the tree leaves are green." But the thing I call a table, with its corruption, we will need to say that it is no longer; that later it will no longer be day; that the leaves of the tree are no longer green, etc. The second way of investigation is not a 'false' way, as it explains the logic of false identity among the concrete things named by mortals.¹³

However, it might be possible to go a little further. What motivates the mortals' errors is a cosmological truth: the way of all concrete things (*panta*) is reversible (*palintropos*, B6.9). It is the necessity of becoming and perishing that precludes saying that any of these things truly are. From this perspective, it is noteworthy that Necessity is mentioned both in the cosmological context and in the

¹¹ Cf. Mourelatos (2008), 153.

¹² Couloubaritsis (2008), 265-267 argues that the Second Way would express an ambiguity between not being in the sense of absolute Nothingness and as "something that could be either in the present or in the future". My current proposal is an attempt to construe Parmenides' principles without attributing to his formulation an ambiguity.

¹³ In the above examples, I am suggesting that Φ could be substituted for predicates expressing properties. But Stephen White pointed out to me that a 'second-order' reading in similar lines is not impossible. The point then would be that certain propositions cannot bear the necessity that descriptions such as those of *to eon* in B8 do. This opens the possibility for extending the acceptance of expressions on the First Way of Investigation not only for those descriptions of Being, but more generally also for propositions in the domain of mathematics or principal cosmological truths (like that every individual thing is constituted of Light and Night).

argument about Being. Perhaps the idea of a “principle of preservation” makes the connection between the two spheres.¹⁴ Simplicius reports, with respect to the cosmic divinity, that she takes souls from the visible to the invisible, from the invisible to the visible. The doxographic notices describing a parallel with Er’s myth of the *Republic* explain what this is about: in the mention of “two pillars” by which souls ascend and descend, the description is a cosmological symbol associated with the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn,¹⁵ which mark the Sun’s trajectory throughout the year, higher in the sky and further North during winter, lower and further South during summer. A reference to the reason why males originate in the North, associated with cold, and females in the South, associated with hot,¹⁶ seems to complete the framework of a system – highly speculative, no doubt – in which opposite qualities are distributed according to a system of compensations, both in time and space, or in a perspective that is, so to speak, both static and dynamic.

Preservation Principle

a positive quality or force at the w position is necessarily compensated by a negative quality or force at the z position.

Such a principle would also seem to justify the statement, attributed to Parmenides, concerning the stability of the Earth: it is located in a position where the forces in some way cancel each other.

One of the characteristics of Being, in fact, prepares the cosmological, space-time expression of a coordinate system: *isopales* (B8.44), which literally designates a state of “balance of forces” (usually taken only as a metaphor by interpreters, in the context of the analogy with the mass of a sphere, but perhaps it is not). The ontological requirement that there should be no greater or lesser intensity or degree of being “here or there” can be fulfilled with a

¹⁴ In an oral communication, Mathilde Brémond made a similar point, but she construed the Parmenidean principle in terms of preservation of mass.

¹⁵ Numenius, fr. 31. Cf. Morrison (1955).

¹⁶ Aetius, V 7 (*Dox.* 419,12-23).

compensation of opposite qualities from a cosmological point of view. The presence of a positive property here would be matched by a negative property elsewhere. And so no change is “real” from the point of view of the totality of what is, or from the point of view of cosmological principles: all things, the goddess teaches, are expressions of Light and Night, and beyond them there is nothing (fr. 9). But such things, mortals do not know.

*

To conclude, what results from this picture? Certainly, a Parmenides who downplays the “entity” status of individual things, which does not make room for an ontology suitable for the project of a *Physics*, as Aristotle intends. Parmenides’ thesis blocks, in this sense, the project of a science of natural entities. His cosmological principles, on the other hand, do not deserve the right to be called “entities” either. This is to our frustration, perhaps, but Aristotle was already warning us about it. This does not mean, however, from the inner standpoint of Parmenidean thought, that it is incoherent: he does not claim (as we would like) to *ground* his cosmology in an ontology of individual entities; he does not exactly elaborate a “physics” in the Aristotelian sense (which depends on a theory of substance, of the principles of matter and form as explanatory of change, etc.) The argument about being, from the standpoint of Parmenidean cosmology, plays a more negative, critical role: it prepares the dissolution of false identities of the objects of mortals’ opinions, in favor of explanations based on contrary principles, Light and Night and derivatives. Thus, Parmenides reaches a new level in the investigation of nature, making explicit the postulation of explanatory principles, as such. In this sense at least, he moves forward in epistemological reflection, as a consequence of the Ionian and Milesian investigations of “all things,” rather than being a detractor of this program.

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Submitted in 18/06/2022 and accepted for publication 26/08/2022



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