

# Philosophy of the Human Person

## Lecture #16

### Parmenides

#### 1. The Philosophy of Nature

what is it?

*ta physica* [Gk]—the general account of the world of change

lit., “physics”—but that term now means something more specific

the world of change

material objects, in contrast to God & mathematical objects

note that modern sciences focus on particular kinds of things differentiated

according to the kinds of change they undergo

physics

chemistry

biology

its central questions

what kinds of things are there? (ontology)

how is change possible?

how is it relevant to the philosophy of man?

comparison & contrast of man & other things done on the basis of a set of

general concepts necessary to describing things in the world of change

the soul

what kind of a concept?

popular assumption—“soul” as fundamentally a religious notion

existence of soul knowable only by revelation

reality—concept of soul based in Greek philosophy, not in theology

concept of soul as necessary to natural account of human powers

(according to some philosophers)

less central to Christian concept of afterlife than often assumed

the soul in Greek thought

*psyche* (Gk., “soul”), by definition, the principle of life

i.e., what makes living things alive

so, the question is not the *existence* of the soul

since some things are alive, there must be a principle of life

the question is what exactly it is that makes living things live

i.e., nature of the soul?

part of the philosophy of *nature* because living things are natural things  
life is a kind of activity that some natural things show  
this activity must be explained  
the soul in Christian Theology [see Handout]

## 2. Outline History Of Greek Philosophy

[See Handout]

standard version

three periods

Pre-Socratic (600-400 BC)

Socrates, Plato & Aristotle (450 -325 BC)

late Greek philosophy (after 325 BC)

why Socrates as the point of division?

no complete works survive from before his time

many complete works of Plato & Aristotle survive

his emphasis on humanistic concerns is seen as a watershed

my version

three periods

Pre-Eleatic (600-500 BC)

Eleatic (485–425 BC)

Post-Eleatic (470–325 BC)

why Parmenides of Elea as the point of division?

before Parmenides

beginning with Thales of Miletus

quest for unity underlying diversity of observed world

is it fundamentally material (the Milesian answer)?

or arithmetic (the Pythagorean answer)?

this is a theme of science down to our own day

Parmenides' challenge—how is change possible at all?

after Parmenides—his question *must* be answered

after the early responses of Anaxagoras and Empedocles

mature responses of Democritus, Plato & Aristotle

two characteristics of Greek philosophical thought

(NB: the Greeks did not distinguish philosophy from natural science

this lays the foundations for both modern projects)

mythological replaced by naturalistic accounts of phenomena

traditional (renarrational) replaced by critical approach

hence attention to logic

### 3. The Arguments of Parmenides

methodological principle—follow logic wherever it leads

distinguish what is known by logic from what appears true to the senses

this distinction between appearance and reality ...

is a theme of Greek philosophy from its beginning

for Parmenides is a distinction between the way of illusion and the way of reality

is a feature of modern science

(though with reservations to keep it from going to extremes)

two substantive principles

(1) what does not exist (Non-being) does not exist

(2) what does exist (Being) is (a) one

(b) indivisible

(c) unmoveable

(d) unchangeable

each of these predicates must hold if one is to avoid positing the existence of the non-existent

the arguments

Against Pluralism

(1) If the world includes a number of distinct things,

then the things would have to be spatially separated from one another.

(2) If things are spatially separated from one another,

then they are separated by nothing [“non-being”].

(3) If they are separated, but by non-being,

then non-being exists.

(4) That non-being exists is absurd.

□ (5) The world does not include a number of distinct things.

Against Motion

(1) If things move,

then there must be an empty place to which things can move.

(2) If there is an empty place to which things can move,

then there must be places in which there is nothing [“non-being”].

(3) If there are places in which there is nothing [“non-being”],

then non-being exists.

(4) That non-being exists is absurd.

□ (5) Things do not move.

Against Change

(1) If change occurs,

then something non-existent comes into existence.

- (2) What can't do anything can't come into existence.
- (3) What does not exist cannot do anything.
- (4) Non-existent things do not exist.
- (5) Non-existent things can't come into existence
- (6) Change does not occur.

#### Zeno's Paradoxes

what Parmenides' critics said:

If Parmenides' principles are true, then nothing moves.

But some things do move.

So, his principles must be false [M. tollens]

Zeno's reply:

in general

The common sense views (pluralism, the reality of motion) lead to absurdities also

So they (by parity of reasoning) must be wrong as well

for example

Anything that can move from one place to another in a finite amount of time must be able first to cross half the distance, then half the remaining distance, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Anything that can do that can take an infinite number of steps in a finite amount of time .

Nothing can take an infinite number of steps in a finite amount of time .

So, nothing can move.