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### PLATO'S CRITICISM OF PARMENIDES' CONCEPTION OF BEING AS FOUND IN THE **SOPHIST**

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At the beginning of this paper, before talking about Plato's criticism of Parmenides, it is necessary to give a brief summary of Parmenides' doctrine.

As with almost all of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, the exact dates in Parmenides' life are not very well known. According to Burnet and several other commentators, all we know is that Plato, in his **Theaetetus** and the **Sophist** says that Parmenides came to Athens when he was sixty - five accompanied by Zeno and talked with Socrates (**Theaetetus** 183 e), (**Sophist** 217 e).

The teaching of Parmenides is contained in his Poem. It is divided into two parts, The Way of Truth and the Way of Belief. The opening of the poem, where he is carried to the goddess, can be said to be an allegorical description of his conversion from some form of error to truth. Unlike Heraclitus who searched himself to find truth, Parmenides takes the words of the goddess as giving truth.

In this article we are concerned with the first part of the poem, so, some fragments which are held to be sufficiently clear to expose Parmenides' views on being and non-being will be given.

«Come now, I will tell thee, and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away-the only ways of search that can be thought of. The first, namely, that **It is** and that it is impossible for it not to be, is the way of belief, for truth is its companion. The other, namely, that **it is not** and that it needs not be-that I tell thee, is a path none can learn of at all. For thou canst not know what is not, that is impossible, nor utter it, for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be».

«It needs must be that what can be spoken and thought is, for it is possible for it to be, and it is not possible for what is nothing to be.» «For this shall never be proved, that the things that are not are.» «Only one path is left for us to speak of, namely, that **It is.**»

What does he mean by what is? It might be what we today call «body». There is a suggestion that it is extended because he refers to it as a sphere. (**De Caelo**, 1298 b, Aristotle) Also, to assert that **It is** implies that there is no empty space, therefore, no motion. If no motion, there is no change. Change is an illusion.

In the earlier parts of his poem, he tells that the point all the views he rejects have in common is the existence of what is not. Can «what is not» be thought of? It cannot. If you think at all you must think of something. Therefore there is no nothing. Only that can exist which can be thought, for thought exists for the sake of what is.

What is, is uncreated and indestructible. It could not have arisen out of nothing, for there is no such thing as nothing. Nor can it have arisen from something, for there is no room for anything but itself. It cannot have beside it any empty space in which something else may come into being, for empty space is nothing, nothing cannot be thought and therefore cannot exist. Being, or what is, is a finite, spherical, motionless, corporeal plenum, and there is nothing beyond it. The appearance of multiplicity, motion, empty space and time are illusions.

In the **Sophist**, Socrates, Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger set themselves the task of defining a sophist. They try to do this by a method characteristic of Plato and the Academy, the method of division or the logical division of a genus into its species. As a demonstration of the method, Plato gives a definition of the angler.

*The same method as applied to the sophist shows him in several guises - a paid hunter of rich youths, an exporter of spiritual lore, a merchant who sells such - lore in the home market and abroad, a controversialist, a discoverer of antinomies everywhere. But his most characteristic trait seems to be finding antinomies everywhere-in morals politics, divinity, cosmology. In all of these fields he professes to be an expert. Since no man can be an expert in all these fields, the sophist must be posing as one. He must be making images.*

We know that there are two kinds of images. First, there are exact likenesses which copy the original or the model and deceptive reproductions, called phantasms in which the character of the original is distorted in some way. Since the sophist is an imitation maker, what sort of images does he give to his students? That is, do his images reflect the true character of reality, or are they phantasms? If we say that the images he creates are phantasms rather than likenesses of truth, we are faced with the problem, which, I think, is the central one of the dialogue. The images the sophist creates seem to fall under the class of phantasms which are not exact reproductions, but in some sense, distortions. They are like the original, but not true reproductions. These images, too, have some sort of reality, which is of a lower kind. They may be said to be like the shadows in the Myth of the Cave, which are the shadows of the real world of Forms.

Accepting this view, we also have to accept that there can be such things as false images, false statements. And we have to accept that some things which are not, in a sense, are. But had not Parmenides said that it was impossible to think or say what is not? We seem to be admitting what Parmenides strongly denied. We are saying what is not can be, can have some sort of reality. This is a problem which has to be solved before Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger can go on defining the sophist. Cornford seems to find three parts to the problem, the ontological or metaphysical, the psychological and the logical.

The **ontological** problem is the following : If there is a Real being such as Parmenides' One Being or Plato's Ideas, how can there also be a world of seeming or appearance? Parmenides had denied the existence of such an area. What is, is, what is not, is not. There is not an intermediary stage between the two. Both realms are absolute, as he

had said in his poem. He also gave the definition of One Being as excluding change and motion, which our senses show us. Taking his definition of the One very strictly, he termed all change and motion as unreal and gave no explanation of them.

Parmenides also asserted that there is knowledge corresponding to the One Being and ignorance corresponding to non-being. Plato, opposing it, says in the *Republic* that between knowledge of the perfectly real and the absence of any knowledge, there is opinion, *doxa*. The objects of knowledge are ideas, what type of objects correspond to opinion? These objects, he says, «partake both of being and of non-being.» There are, for example, many beautiful things which are not like the Beautiful in that they change, come into being and perish. These, or the particular sense objects are what Plato calls likenesses or images. «It would remain, then, as it seems, for us to discover that which partakes of both, of to be and not to be and that could not be rightly designated either in its exclusive purity, so that if it shall be discovered, we may justly pronounce it to be the opinable, thus assigning extremes to extremes and the intermediate to the intermediate.» (*Republic*, Book V, 478 e) «And can you find a better place to put them than midway between existence or essence and the not to be?» (*Republic*, Book V, 479 c) For Plato, then, as he states in the *Republic*, there are three states of being, Ideas, sense objects and non-being and three corresponding stages of cognition, true knowledge, opinion, and ignorance. In the *Theaetetus* the explanation of perception of sensible objects has been given and the infallibility of sense perception asserted. «Rather, when I become percipient, I must become percipient of some thing, for I cannot have a perception and have it of nothing.» (*Theaetetus*, 160 a) And false perception of sensible objects has been given and the infallibility of sense perception as misrepresentations in memory. These sense objects, of which we have the sensations, were described in the *Theaetetus* as becoming, not real being in the absolute sense.

The second part of the problem is the **psychological** one. That is, how can we think or say what is not true? Parmenides had deduced from his conception of the One Being that it was impossible either to think or to utter what is not, for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be. Thought and speech must have an object to refer to and it must be real. Now, is it possible to think or say what is not real, or what is false? Socrates, in *Theaetetus* 188 d says, «May it not simply be that one who thinks **what is not** about anything cannot but be thinking what is false, whatever his state of mind may be in other respects?» When we think or talk, we do so about something. What corresponds to this something if what we think or say is false?

The third part is what I call the **logical** or the **linguistic** one, the problem of negative judgements. I gather that the «is not» which occurs in the negative judgements in Greek, has also the meaning of «does not exist.» Therefore he who is talking of what is not, is not referring to anything, or is not saying or meaning anything. What are we talking about when we say «x is not?» I cannot be talking about anything that is for I am saying that it is not. If I were talking about something, I would be talking about what is, the Eleatics argue.

So, are we making a meaningless sound when we say «x is not»? To give an example; when it is asserted that there are no ghosts what are we talking about? It certainly cannot be about ghosts, because the statement is used to deny their existence. If so, what is the ontological commitment of the statement? Can we say that we are not making a significant statement at all? To say so would be absurd.

**The Worlds of Reality and Appearance:** The section between 237 b-251 a of the **Sophist** deals with Reality and Appearance. Plato, in **Republic** Book V, has divided the discussions into three parts:

1. **The non-real.** One who is talking about what is not is talking about nothing. Even if we are to talk about it, we must do so either in the plural or the singular. We cannot attribute what exists to what does not, not-entity can have no predicates. It is impossible to talk about it without using such words as «the», «it». Plato, in the **Sophist**, accepts with Parmenides that it is impossible to talk about what is not, or non-being. We can neither think nor speak of it. «You see the inference then: one cannot legitimately utter the words or speak or think of that which just simply is not; it is unthinkable, not to be spoken of or uttered or expressed,» says the Stranger. (**Sophist**, 238 c)

The difficulty here is that since we cannot say anything about what is not, we cannot talk about the sophist as an illusion-maker. He would reply that since an illusion is nothing, «maker of an illusion» is a meaningless sound. Unless the sophist deceives us by producing a false belief in us, there is no illusion and if he does produce a false belief the false belief must be something real. To avoid this, the thing to do is to change the principle of Parmenides and say that «what is not in a way is, and what is in a sense, is not. «We shall find it necessary in self-defense to put to question that pronouncement of father Parmenides., and establish by main force that what is not in some respect has being, and conversly, that what is, in a way, is not. (**Sophist**, 241 d)

We have to escape from the Parmenidean dilemma and recognize something which is between the perfectly real and the totally unreal.

2. What is there between the perfectly real and the totally unreal? What kind of an existence can we attribute to it? Cornford uses the word «eidolon» to explain it. Eidolon is something that is not «being» in the full sense, but has some sort of being. It is what we call an image. The passage between 239 c and 240 b gives a definition of «image» as something that has some sort of existence without being really real.

3. At this point it is necessary to define the **real**, the perfectly real. The Eleatic Stranger brings this out in 243 c, «Possibly, then, our minds are in the same state of confusion about reality. We profess to be quite at ease about the real and to understand the word when it is spoken, though we may not understand the unreal, when perhaps we are equally in the dark about both.»

Here, Plato undertakes to examine what philosophers before him meant by «reality», or «being». In this study, Plato divides the philosophers into the pluralists and the monists. He asks the Pre-Socratic philosophers what they meant when they said reality, being, is Hot and Cold. That is, being is a third term, not identical with the hot or the cold. If the physicists do not admit «being» is a different form, they will be in a dilemma;

a) If they say «being» is cold, then hot will not be, because cold is not hot;

b) Or if they identify it with hot and cold, then «that which is hot and cold» will be one thing. There will not be two real things. Thus, we see that the physicists' contention is not tenable.

In the passage between 244 b - 245 e, the monist's, Parmenides', conception is criticized by the Eleatic Stranger. Parmenides had held that his One Being alone had any

kind of existence. The whole of reality is a One Being, a Unity. The Eleatic Stranger begins to criticize the Parmenidian doctrine. His first argument is that if there is only one real thing, it is not consistent to give it two names. Plato holds that names have meanings which are Ideas of which the thing bearing the name partakes. If we attribute to the One real being two names, «One» and «real», we are using three names, the Idea's being, unity and the thing which has these names and participates in those terms. So, Plato shows that when Parmenides asserts there is One Being, he has to recognize at least three real beings. The same argument that was directed against the physicists is now used to refute the Parmenidean doctrine. As it was said that we could not say being was hot and cold, Parmenides cannot assert his One Being without also accepting the ideas Unity and Being.

**Second Criticism** : Parmenides had described the One Real thing as the whole. But Plato had said that the whole was a collection of parts. Nothing can be called a whole unless it has parts. «Because if a thing has parts, the whole thing must be the same as all the parts.» (*Theat.* 204.) Parmenides had said that the All is a finite sphere, with a circumference and center, which, the Stranger says, implies it has parts.

Plato tries to show that if Parmenides' One real thing is a whole of parts, it cannot be identical with unity itself. And a dilemma, according to Cornford, follows from this, which can be stated thus : **Either**, Being is a whole of parts or it is not a whole of parts. **If**, it is a whole of parts, it is not unity itself and there will be plurality. **Or**, the One is not whole of parts. **If** this is the case, then **either**, wholeness exists or wholeness does not exist. **But** if wholeness exists, the One will not be a thing that is and there will be plurality, One and wholeness. On the other hand, if wholeness does not exist, the One will not be a thing that is, there will be plurality, there will be no coming into being of a thing that is and there will be no finite number.

The Stranger begins his criticism of Parmenides by establishing a premise which is used in the above dilemma. If the One is a whole of parts it has the property of unity, but it is not identical with Unity itself, because Unity is defined as that which has no parts, the indivisible. In fact, this is the definition of unity given by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* 1016 b. «Now, that which is indivisible in quantity is called a unit if it is not divisible in any dimension, and is without position.» Therefore, if Parmenides' One is a whole of parts, it is not identical with Unity itself.

Parmenides had said that the One was indivisible. It might mean that the One is continuous with no empty space in between and he might have meant it to be absolute unity, which does not include any kind of plurality. If he took it as absolute unity, he was inconsistent in speaking of it as a sphere with parts.

In 245 b, the Stranger shows that whether we take One being as one whole or we do not call it a whole at all, leads us to a contradiction of Parmenides' teaching, 245 b, «if the real has the property of being in a sense one, it will evidently not be the same thing as Unity and so all things will be more than one.»

On the other hand, if being is not a whole, then either there is such a thing as wholeness even though being does not partake of it, or there is no such thing as wholeness. Parmenides had said that «nor may being be imperfect, for it lacks nothing; and if it were imperfect, it would lack everything.» If being does not partake of wholeness it will fall short of itself.

The Stranger seems to infer that without wholeness, 245 d, «you have no right to speak of either being or coming into being as having any existence... And, further, what is not a whole cannot have any definite number either, for if a thing has a definite number, it must amount to number, whatever it may be, as a whole.»

These conclusions do not seem to be very strong criticisms of the Parmenidean doctrine because he has already denied coming into being and existence.

We see that the notion of being causes difficulties. Trying to solve them, Plato goes on to examine the views of the pluralists, that is, the materialists and the idealists.

The materialists, the Giants, hold that the only real things are tangible bodies, and body and being are the same. On the other hand, the idealists, Gods, believe that the reality consists of intelligible, bodiless forms, and at the same time, hold the view that what the materialists take as being is only becoming.

Cornford says there is no need to try to find out exactly what schools of thought the Giants and the Gods represent «Here, as always, Plato is philosophising, not writing the history of philosophy.»

There is a suggestion, however, that the materialist account of the nature of the real is like the Atomism of Leucippus and Democritus. The Stranger asks the materialist if there is not such a thing as a soul, whether some souls are not wise, others not foolish. They will be forced to say yes to this. We will then ask them whether virtues, like wisdom, are real. They cannot say they are bodies. At the end, they have to admit that there can be some things which are real but not bodies. Here, the Stranger makes the following suggestion to the materialist, «I suggest that anything has a real being that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however small degree by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once. I am proposing as a **mark** to distinguish real things that they are nothing but power.» Does Plato himself take this mark of reality as a definition? What he gives is an alternative to the definition of the real of the materialists.

The materialist's ground for believing in the reality of tangible objects was that they had the power to affect his sense of touch, but this power of affecting and being affected is not confined to the tangible bodies. Knowledge, too, is a process of affecting and being affected. He can know whether there is or there is not justice in a soul, so he has to say the just as well as the stone exists.

On the other hand, the idealist or the Friends of Forms make a sharp distinction between becoming and real being. According to them, we have intercourse with, are in touch with, becoming by means of the body through sense, and we have intercourse with real being by means of the soul through reflection. It is becoming which changes, being is not changeable. They also hold that the power of acting and being acted on belongs to the realm of becoming, not being.

It is acknowledged by them that the soul knows and the real being is known. The Stranger asks the idealist if he admits that "being" is known by the mind, and whether "being known" is not "being acted on" and knowing, an activity. In order to remain consistent with what he had said before, the idealist will have to deny

both statements. If "being" is acted on in being known, it is moved and is not unchangeable. We cannot think of the perfectly real as neither living nor thinking, nor as thinking but not living. If it thinks and is alive, it must have a soul; and if it has a soul, it cannot stand everlastingly still. It must have movement. «On these grounds, then, it seems that only one course is open to the philosopher who values knowledge and the rest above all else. He must refuse to accept from the champions either of the One or the Many forms the doctrine that all reality is changeless; and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represents reality as everywhere changing. Like a child begging for both, he must declare that reality or the sum of things, is both at once - all that is unchangeable and all that is in change.» (Sophist 249 c and d.)

After 249 d, Cornford says «being» takes on a different meaning. There is a shift from metaphysics to linguistics or logic. The Stranger points out that the conclusion «being is all that is in change and all that is unchangeable» is like saying that «being consists of hot and cold.» It could be said again that beingness does not mean «moving» or «at rest», but is a third thing of which Motion and Rest themselves both partake. Therefore, it is false to say being, qua-being, is either at rest or in motion. Motion, Rest, Being are all distinct, Being embraces both of the others, though it is neither of them. It seems to be as difficult to find out what «being» is the name for, as it was to discover what «what is not» is the name for. Since both being and non-being prove to be puzzling, the next step Plato takes is to analyze «is» and «is not» as used in the sentences. In 251 a, the Stranger begins to analyze how we can call the same thing by several names. Some, according to Plato, hold that there must be one name for one thing. Therefore, we cannot say «this book is heavy» but «a book is book», «a heavy is heavy.»

Plato would have replied that a common name, like a «book», is not only the name of the individual thing, but has a universal meaning which is an Idea. «This book is heavy» means that this book partakes of the Idea, Heavy. It is clear that a particular thing may partake of my number of Ideas, the book, besides being heavy, may be new, black, interesting etc. What is important is how ideas partake of one another. According to Plato, some Ideas combine, blend, with other Ideas, some do not. From the combination, or non-combination of Ideas among themselves, consequences follow with regard to the truth and falsity of statements about individual things.

There are three possibilities with regard to the extent of combination among Ideas: A. **No Idea combines with any other** - the outcome of it would be that nothing can be said about an Idea, it can only be named. Then, we cannot say «motion is» or «rest is». In fact, no affirmative statement about an Idea can be made. According to Socrates' dream in the *Theat.* 201 d, each simple element can only be named; we cannot predicate that «it is», or call it «this», «that», «each», and «every».

Ritter and Burnet take Plato to mean by this that there is no thinking except in the form of a judgement, in the connection of a subject and a predicate. This also means no word by itself has any meaning except in a judgement. If this is the case, «is» and «is not» have no meanings except in judgements. Cornford does not seem to hold that this is Plato's theory of meaning. He says, for Plato, the meaning of a name is the Idea of it. The meaning of a door is the Idea, Door. This being so, a

name can have a meaning whether it is used in connection with other Ideas or not. B. **All Ideas combine with each other** - That alternative is also untenable, because as Theaetetus says in 252 d, «then, movement itself would come to a complete standstill, and again rest itself would be in movement, if each were to supervene upon each other.»

C. **Some Ideas will blend, some will not** - This means some affirmations and some negative statements about Ideas are true. It is the task of the expert in dialectic to study in what way the Ideas combine with each other. In the section 254 b-d. the purpose is to show the meanings of «is» and «is not» so that we can say that «is not» in a sense «is». The analysis of the Ideas, Being, Motion, Rest will give all the senses of «is» and «is not». Besides these, the ideas, Sameness and Difference help us in this analysis. Every Idea is same as itself and different from every other Idea. With these five distinct Ideas, we can make true statements, asserting that «what is» in a sense «is not».

Motion is not. (Rest)

Motion is. (Being, i.e. exists)

Motion is the same. (As itself)

Motion is not the same. (Sameness)

Motion is not different. (Difference)

Motion is different. (From difference)

Being is. (Being)

Being is not. (Any other Idea)

Of any Idea, it can be said that it is a thing that is not, (namely, any other Idea), and also a thing that is. Thus, Parmenides' «that which is» cannot «not be» is refuted. Also, Parmenides held that «there is no sense in which that which is not can be.» But if «that which is not» is taken to mean that which is **different**, it is, in this sense, distinct from non-existence and «the non-existent». When we say «that which is not», Plato asserts that we do not mean something contrary to what exists, but only something that is different. For instance, when we say «not beautiful», we mean all the Ideas other than Beautiful. Thus, it has been asserted that what is, in a sense, is not, and what is not, in a sense, is.

After the exposition of Plato's criticism of Parmenides' conception of being and not being, let us consider briefly what has been done in this paper. First of all, what is the nature of the central problem? Is Plato giving a metaphysical account of being and not being, as for instance, J. P. Sartre was doing in **Being and Nothingness**?

The other possibility is that what Plato was doing was making a linguistic analysis and setting down the two different senses of «being». Apparently, there was no distinction in Greek between the «is» of existence and the copula. Possibly, when a Greek said «This is not a book», he might be understood to mean «The book does not exist».

Parmenides, not taking this difference into account, had set up his system, which is full of contradictions. For example, he says, «you cannot talk about what is not» although he himself is talking about what it is and what it is not.



Almost all of the metaphysical problems suggested by Parmenides are solved when a careful analysis of the terms are made. What is a strong point in supposing that the problem is mainly linguistic is that, when the same problem is translated into some other language, for instance, Turkish, the difficulty seems to disappear. This is because there is a distinction between the two senses of «is», and it is almost impossible to confuse the two.

I believe what Plato had accomplished was putting down the rules of «being» and «non-being» so that metaphysical confusions like those of Parmenides can be avoided.

## PLATON'UN PARMENİDES'DE «VARLIK» KAVRAMINI ELEŞTİRMESİ

### ÖZET

Felsefe tarihinde çok az problem Parmenides'in «var-oluş» ve «var-olmayış» arasında gördüğü çelişme ve bu çelişmenin doğurduğu metafizik sonuçlar kadar ilginçtir. Bir yanda her zaman, bu yerde olan, değişmeyen Varlık, öbür yanda ise var olmıyan, düşünilemiyen hatta hakkında hiçbir şey söyleyemeyeceğimiz Yokluk, Bilgi ve Gerçek ise hep Varlığın yanında; öbür yanda hiçbir şey yok.

Platon böylesine kökten ayrılan iki dünyayı bir köprü ile bağlamaya çalışır. Hiç bilmemekten bilgiye, var-olmayandan var-olana geçişi sağlamaktır amacı. Bu ancak «varlık»ın dilsel bir incelenmesi ile gerçekleşebilir. Klasik Yunancanın belirli bir özelliği bu yapılmaya yol açmış ve felsefede sık sık gördüğümüz «dil alanı»ndan «varlık alanı»na haksız geçişlerin başlangıcı olmuştur.