

ELEATIC MONISM  
AND LATER  
PRESOCRATIC THOUGHT

THE LEGACY OF PARMENID



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## **THE LEGACY OF PARMENIDES**

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# THE LEGACY OF PARMENIDES

**Eleatic Monism  
and Later Presocratic Thought**

*Patricia Curd*



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**For M. V. C.**

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## *Preface*

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This book began as a series of papers on Presocratic issues written in 1990–91 while I was a Junior Fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies. After returning from the center, I continued to think and to write about the Presocratics, and it became clear to me that I was actually writing a book. In completing it, I have received support and encouragement from a number of people and institutions.

The Center for Hellenic Studies provided a wonderful place to work that ~~W~~st year, and it has welcomed me back on a number of research visits. I am very grateful to the director during my time there, Zeph Stewart, and to the present directors, Kurt RaaXaub and Deborah Boedeker, and to the center's librarian, Ellen Roth.

My work has been supported by a Fellowship for University Teachers from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by the Center for Humanistic Studies of the School of Liberal Arts at Purdue University; I am thankful for the support of these institutions. In addition, several Faculty Development Grants from the Purdue University School of Liberal Arts subsidized research trips and computer equipment, and I am pleased to acknowledge this valuable assistance. The deans of the School of Liberal Arts, David Caputo and Thomas Adler, were active in their support, as were philosophy department heads William Rowe and Rod Bertolet. The inter-library loan department of the Purdue libraries was indispensable.

An early version of Chapter IV was read at the Princeton Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy in 1992, and I am grateful to the commentator, Christopher Kirwan, for his remarks. Some of the material in Chapters I, II, IV, and V was presented at meetings of the American Philosophical Association and the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy. My thanks to participants at all these meetings for their comments and suggestions.

I am indebted to Ann Wald, Editor in Chief of Princeton University Press, to her assistant Helen Hsu, and to Marta Steele, who copyedited the book; it has been a joy to work with them. I am grateful for the comments and suggestions of two anonymous readers for the Press.

A number of people deserve special mention. For allowing me to use and to refer to unpublished material, thanks are due to David Furley, Daniel Graham, André Laks, and Kirk Sanders. Carl HuVman, John Kirby, and Alexander Nehamas read and commented on parts of the manuscript and answered many questions. Alexander P. D. Mourelatos was generous with help and advice. James Leshner read and commented on the entire book and answered numerous emails; he deserves particular thanks for his help and

his willingness to pursue an argument to its end. My work has been much improved by the comments and suggestions of all these people, and if I have been stubborn enough to ignore some of what they have suggested to me, the fault (and responsibility) is entirely mine. John Cooper, James Leshner, and Alexander Nehamas encouraged me even before this project began, and I am immensely grateful to them for years of support since then. My greatest debt is to Martin Curd, who read and reread, commented and commented again; he has been my best editor and strongest critic, and this book owes much to his patience and philosophical acumen.

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## *Acknowledgements*

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Some of the material in this book is drawn from papers I have published in the past. In all cases I have rethought my positions, in some instances changing my mind. I am grateful to the editors and publishers who have allowed me to draw from this previously printed material. Full citations of these articles will be found in the bibliography.

Some discussions of Heraclitus are adapted from "Knowledge and Unity in Heraclitus," *The Monist* vol. 74 (1991) Copyright © 1991, *The Monist*, La Salle, IL 61301. Reprinted by permission.

Some of the material in Chapters I and II is based on "Parmenidean Monism," *Phronesis* vol. 36 (1991). Used by permission of E. J. Brill.

Part of Chapter III first appeared in "Deception and Belief in Parmenides' *Doxa*," reprinted from *APEIRON: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* vol. 25 (1992), by permission of Academic Printing and Publishing.

Some of the discussions of Zeno and Melissus are drawn from "Eleatic Monism in Zeno and Melissus," *Ancient Philosophy* vol. 13 (1993) used by permission of *ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY*.

In Chapter VI, fragments of Philolaus, translated by Patricia Curd, originally appeared in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, edited by Cohen, Curd, and Reeve, Copyright 1995, Hackett Publishing Co., Inc. Reprinted with permission.



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## *A Note on Texts and Translations*

The usual method of referring to the Presocratics has been followed. Each philosopher is assigned a number by DK; where the reference may be unclear, I have included that number. “A” refers to the section of testimonia assigned to each philosopher by DK; “B” refers to the section of fragments accepted as authentic by DK.

Statistical observations are based on and word searches have used the data bank of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG)*.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

For the texts of the fragments and testimonia on the Presocratics, I have, except where noted, followed DK. For Plato, I have used the J. Burnet editions in the Oxford Classical Texts series. Texts for the Commentators on Aristotle follow the editions of the Berlin Academy *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*. Other texts are listed below.

Aeschylus, *Aeschyli Tragoediae*. 2d ed., ed. G. Murray (1955; reprinted Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

Bacchylides, *Bacchylidis Carmina cum Fragmentis*, ed. H. Maehler (post B. Snell), 10th ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1970).

Euripides, *Euripidis Fabulae*, ed. G. Murray, vol. 1 (1902; reprinted Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

Herodotus, *Historiae*, ed. C. Hude (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908).

Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. M. L. West (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

Homer, *Homeri Odyssea*, ed. P. von der Muehll (Basel: Helbing and Lichtenhahn, 1962).

Pindar, *Pindari Carmina cum Fragmentis*, ed. H. Maehler (post B. Snell) (Leipzig: Teubner, pt. 1, 5th ed., 1971; pt. 2, 4th ed., 1975).

Sophocles, *Sophocle*, ed. A. Dain and P. Mazon (vol. 1, 1955; reprinted Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1958; vol. 2, 1958; reprinted Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968).

Thucydides, *Thucydidis Historiae*, ed. H. S. Jones and J. E. Powell, 2 vols. (1942; vol. 1, reprinted Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970; vol. 2, 2d ed., reprinted Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).



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## Abbreviations

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The following abbreviations have been used throughout.

- DG Diels, H. *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965)
- DK Diels, H., and W. Kranz, eds. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 3 vols. Reprint of sixth edition (Berlin: Weidmann, 1974)
- HGP Guthrie, W.K.C. *A History of Greek Philosophy* Vols. I and II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol. I, 1962; vol. II, 1965)
- KR Kirk, G. S., and J. E. Raven. *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957)
- KRS Kirk, G. S., J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)
- LSJ Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968)
- PP Barnes, J. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979)

Abbreviations for ancient works follow LSJ supplemented by the second edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, although there are occasional expansions for ease of recognition.





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## Introduction to the Paperback Version \_\_\_\_\_

Since *The Legacy of Parmenides* was first published in late 1997, I have received many comments, criticisms, and suggestions.<sup>1</sup> Reviews and articles, especially those by Daniel Graham, Alexander Mourelatos, and Alexander Nehamas, offered constructive criticisms that have helped to clarify my thoughts about Parmenides and other early Greek thinkers.<sup>2</sup> With the benefit of time and experience (and with the help of critics), I can see how the original could have been better, and were I writing the book now, I would no doubt put things differently. It is not my intention, in this new introduction, to respond directly and systematically to criticisms, but rather to clarify some parts of my view.

Unlike some commentators, I do not take Parmenides to have forbidden or denied the possibility of genuine cosmology. Rather, his aim is to criticize previous accounts of the nature of things while formulating metatheoretical requirements for an acceptable cosmological account. Such an account must be grounded in metaphysically genuine entities and use mechanisms that do not undermine the reality of those basic things. In the *Alētheia* section of the poem, Parmenides argues that what-is is in such a way that it does not come to be, pass away, or alter, and that anything that is must be a whole of a single kind. Only what genuinely is in this way can be an object of genuine thought and so of knowledge or understanding (see B2, B3, B8.1–6, with the full arguments in B8). Any reliable account of the cosmos that will count as knowledge must be suitably grounded in what-is. Anything that is in the way sanctioned by the arguments of B8 counts as metaphysically basic and could

<sup>1</sup> Chapter or page numbers with no other identification refer to this book. I have made some small changes to the original text and corrected some typographical errors, but this is not a revised or second edition. Since completing *Legacy*, I have been primarily concerned with the pluralists, and as I have spent more time with these thinkers, my views on a number of problems in both Empedocles and Anaxagoras have changed. I give a much fuller (and, I hope, more correct) account of Anaxagoras in *Anaxagoras of Clazomenae*, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Interest in early Greek philosophy is flourishing: Conferences and new publications on the Presocratics have enabled me to learn from colleagues and to rethink a number of questions. The 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Philosophy Workshop (in honor of Alexander Mourelatos) in March of 1998 and the October 2000 Lille Conference (on the question “Qu’est-ce que la Philosophie Présocratique?”) organized by André Laks stand out. Both conferences resulted in volumes that contain exciting new work on the Presocratics, as does *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (ed. A.A. Long). For other sources, see the bibliography that follows the acknowledgments section, p. xxvii.

serve as the foundation for a theoretically acceptable account of the world that we perceive.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Monisms

I argue that Parmenides advocates predicational monism (a monism about natures or kinds) rather than numerical monism (a monism about things). Numerical, or strict, monism is the claim that there exists only one thing, and this is the monism that has traditionally been attributed to Parmenides. In challenging the traditional account, I contrast numerical monism with both material monism and what I have called predicational monism. Material monism, the view that everything is or comes from a single material *stuv*, was attributed to the earliest Greek thinkers by Aristotle.<sup>4</sup> The monism that I attribute to Parmenides is neither of these, but a monism about the nature or essence of a thing. Whatever genuinely is must be a strict unity, a whole of a single kind. In discussing this monism, I claim that “each thing that is can be only one thing; it can hold only the one predicate which indicates what it is, and must hold it in a particularly strong way. To be a genuine entity, a thing must be a predicational unity, with a single account of what it is; but it need not be the case that there exists only one such thing” (p. 66). Although I am not entirely happy with the term “predicational monism,” I am not sure what name would be better. Here, I would like to clarify the sort of monism that I attribute to Parmenides, especially my claim that what-is can hold only a single predicate. For this, I *Wst* need to say more about the inquiry into nature and the force of the *esti* in Parmenides.

Chapter I argues that Parmenides wishes to reform the theory and method of inquiry into nature. Can we attain genuine knowledge of the world reported by the senses? Traditional accounts of the feebleness of human experience as a source of knowledge and Xenophanes’ arguments about the fallibility of human understanding had suggested the impossibility of such knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Thus I take Parmenides to belong squarely to the tradition of natural philosophers. I discuss this tradition more fully in “Presocratics as Philosophers,” “New Empedocles,” and “Question of Religion.” A rejection of this sort of interpretation of Parmenides (and of Empedocles) can be found in the work of Kingsley.

<sup>4</sup> A clear statement of alternative versions of material monism can be found in Algra; Barnes defends Aristotle’s view in *PP*. Graham has argued against attributing material monism to the Milesians (“Heraclitus’ Criticism,” a paper published after *Legacy* had gone to press), opting instead for what he calls a generating substance theory. On this account, Milesian theories begin with a single substance (water, the boundless, air) which then generates but does not underlie all other things. Graham works out this theory persuasively; for a strong argument in favor of material monism, see Mourelatos, forthcoming. In this introduction, I refer to “Milesian Monism,” leaving it open which account of their view is correct.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to the work of Leshner and Mourelatos, I now have a greater appreciation of the importance of Xenophanes. His claims about the lack of divine warrant for human understanding,

Heraclitus had seen that a solution to the problem could be found in a link between the nature of human understanding and what is understood, the *logos* in accordance with which all things happen. The *logos* can only be understood by a soul in the proper state; a hot dry human soul can grasp it (recall that the symbol of the *logos* is *We*). But Heraclitus had not given a complete account of the *logos*, nor had he shown how one could be certain that one had indeed understood it. In addition, Heraclitus had (from Parmenides' point of view) conflated what-is and what-is-not.<sup>6</sup> Like Heraclitus, Parmenides sees a natural connection between thought and its object (see B3 and B8.34–37).<sup>7</sup> Crucially, he goes farther in establishing criteria that any object of genuine thought or understanding must meet, and (at the same time, with the same arguments) provides tests for whether those criteria have been met. The argument in the *Alētheia* section of the poem is formal. Parmenides claims that the proper route or way of inquiry will arrive at *what-is* (and argues that any other way of inquiry is impossible since it can lead nowhere). So, any thing that is in the way that the proofs of B8 demand will be something that genuinely is. “What-is” (*to eon*) serves as a formal name for the proper object of knowledge, a placeholder for any entity that is genuinely basic and is thus the right beginning for an account of the nature of things.<sup>8</sup> I argue that the “is” in Parmenides is primarily predicative, and that the predications required by Parmenides' arguments are informative identity statements (pp. 41–42). The only acceptable way to use “is” or *einai* is in the predication of a nature or an essence.<sup>9</sup> Any thing that can be said to be is something that is a basic reality and is what it is essentially. Only what is in this sense of being a nature (what something really or genuinely is) can be an object of genuine knowledge. This means that what-is is both genuinely real and what

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and the subsequent problems of knowledge and belief are crucial for an understanding of the epistemological problems that Parmenides explores. Recent work by Leshner, Mourelatos, Mogyoródi, and Hermann demonstrates the philosophical importance of Xenophanes.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of Heraclitus and Parmenides, see Graham (“Heraclitus and Parmenides,” now published in Caston and Graham), with response by Nehamas (*ibid.*, 45–65).

<sup>7</sup> See Long (“Thinking Being” and “Finding Oneself”) on the connection between thinking and what-is in Parmenides and other early Greek thinkers. I agree with much of what Long says about the object of thought and the connection between thinking and what-is, although I am not sure that his commitment to numerical monism in Parmenides will let him maintain the sort of identity between thought and its object that he suggests. According to Long, thinking and being are not the same in essence, but are “co-extensive types, such that their tokens are identical” (“Thinking Being,” p. 132n.13; cf. pp. 145–46). Numerical monism might not allow for the plurality of types that he needs. On this point, see also Crystal. For a different account of the relation of thought and what-is in Parmenides' project, see Cherubin.

<sup>8</sup> In chapter I, I argue that Parmenides' interest is in metaphysically basic entities, or natures, and that in this he is taking on the attempts of earlier thinkers to explain the fundamental natures of things. Mourelatos rejects this restriction; “Pluralists,” pp. 120–21.

<sup>9</sup> Thus the force of Aristotle's claim that “being is said in many ways.” This is a rejection of the Eleatic (and Platonic—at least pre-*Sophist*) claim that there is but a single acceptable use of “*einai*.”

is revealed in true statement and thought.<sup>10</sup> The claim that X is Y, or that Y is what it is to be X, asserts that X is a basic reality, and that its nature is to be Y.

Genuine thought grasps its object in a single act of apprehension, and its object must be a necessary unity that can be understood in that single act. The arguments of B8 point out how what-is is, and one of the signs at the beginning of B8 (at line 4) is that what-is is “a whole of a single kind.”<sup>11</sup> This is expanded in the claims that what-is is “all together one, continuous” (B8.5–6) and that it is not divisible (B8.22–24). The indivisibility requirement rules out the possibility that what-is can be identified with a homogeneous mixture or with an entity that can actually be separated into independent parts.<sup>12</sup> The milk and the cream in homogenized milk constitute a unity of sorts, but it does not satisfy Parmenides’ criteria precisely because it is an additive unity of milk plus cream, held together by the mixing. Heraclitus’s *kykeōn*, the sacred barley drink that falls apart if it is not stirred (22B125) is an analogous case. It is what it is only through the mixture of its parts, and so it is not a unity in the appropriate sense. It is for this reason that I have said that an entity that can satisfy the unity criterion must be *monogenous* rather than *homogenous*. What is homogenous and thoroughly mixed may be the same all the way through, but if it is a mixed sameness, it is actually a plurality rather than a unity. If we think of *to eon* as what is fundamental or basic in an account of what there is, then we can see that what we begin with must be a unity—each thing that is is a unified whole, all of the same sort or kind. In the predication “X is really F” (or “F is what it is to be X”), F (even if it is a statement or proposition expressed in a plurality of words) is the necessarily unified nature of X. Thus, I claim that Parmenides’ monism is a monism of

<sup>10</sup> Thus the *esti* is both predicational and veridical. To this extent, both Mourelatos and Kahn are right about the force of the *esti*. I think that disagreements between them are less important than their agreement on these issues (though they perhaps would not agree with this). For discussion of their views, see Kahn, “Parmenides and Plato,” (esp. pp. 83–89 and p. 84n.9); for Mourelatos on his view, see “Pluralists,” pp. 121–22. Moreover, whatever is in this sense will also exist, but as I noted (p. 39n.42) this is perhaps the least interesting aspect of Parmenides’ claim and certainly not the focus of his analysis. The fused sense is becoming more widely accepted, although many scholars still speak of the object of Parmenides’ analysis as “what exists.” See, for instance, Sedley (pp. 114–15) and Hankinson (p. 68), both of whom note that for the early Greek philosophical use of *esti*, to be is to be something or other, but then speak of “what exists.” Hankinson says that “in the most important part of [Parmenides’] deduction it is indeed existence as such which is primarily (although not exclusively) at issue.”

<sup>11</sup> I discuss the text and translation of the key term *mounogenes* on pp. 71–73.

<sup>12</sup> Thus my worry (p.72 n.23) whether an Aristotelian essence—like “being a rational animal”—can actually qualify as a Parmenidean one. Insofar as being rational and being an animal are separable, if we think of being a rational animal as being rational *plus* being an animal, it is not a real unity. Aristotle clearly denies that the essence of human beings is an additive unity of this kind, and he is at pains to show that all genuine essences are unities of exactly the sort that concerns Parmenides. I now think that because its definition expresses a genuine unity, the Aristotelian essence “rational animal” would satisfy Parmenides’ criteria.

kinds, and that this kind of monism is consistent with numerical pluralism.<sup>13</sup> Anything that is must be one, but there may be more than one such thing.

## 2. Internal and External Negations

One might agree that what-is must be a whole of a single kind and still argue that this entails that there can exist only one such thing. That is, it might well seem that predicational monism (as I initially described it and as I have amplified it here) entails numerical monism, and that the traditional view that Parmenides is a strict or numerical monist must be correct.<sup>14</sup> There can be no divisions in what-is, and no part of what-is can not be; yet, if there were two or more things, each could be said to be different from, and so not, the others, and so we would be led to the absurd conclusion that what-is is not.

There are, it seems to me, two ways to interpret this objection. First, one might regard *being* or *what-is* as the collective name of anything that is in the way that Parmenides argues for, and view the collection so named as something apart from the things named. Let us, for the sake of example, adopt a tripartite cosmology: suppose that there are three basic entities—water, air, and *We*—each of which (*ex hypothesi*) meets Parmenidean requirements.<sup>15</sup> One might think that there are these three *and* that there is also being, which is the collection of the three. This collection is an apparent unity, yet it is divisible into three constituents (water, air, and *We*), and so being or what-is is divisible in exactly the way that Parmenides rejects. This seems to me to be a category mistake. Just as (in the Rylean case) there is no university apart from the buildings, the people, and so on, so there is no thing, being, apart from the things that are, and being is therefore not divisible in the way envisioned by this version of the objection.

Here is a more serious version of the objection. If we suppose that there can be a plurality of real things, each with its own specific and knowable unified nature, we must say of each that it is different from and so is not each of the others. If we return to our previous sample cosmology: water is different from and so is not *We*, *We* is different from and so is not air, and air is different from and so is not water. If the only allowable predications are claims about natures or essences, then what it is to be water is to be not-*We*, and so on. Thus, plurality demands a negative specification of each

<sup>13</sup> See Nehamas, who contrasts “strict” (numerical) and “kind” monism (or what I call predicational monism). While accepting that what Parmenides says is consistent with kind monism, Nehamas says that “Parmenides’ theory was vague: it was not clearly committed to either sort of monism” (“Being/Fire,” p. 51). I agree that Parmenides leaves open the question of what actually satisfies his criteria, thus allowing the possibility that, as a matter of fact, only one such entity does so, but I think that his primary concern is with predicational or kind monism.

<sup>14</sup> See Crystal, p. 216 n. 34.

<sup>15</sup> As far as I know, no Presocratic adopted such a cosmology.

thing that is, and this is exactly the sort of negative predication ruled out by the arguments of B8.<sup>16</sup> This is the sort of problem that I consider briefly in section 3 of chapter II. I still think that the suggestion made there is correct: if we distinguish between internal and external negations, we can allow for numerically diverse entities without compromising their internal unity. An internal negation (ruled out by the prohibition against what-is-not) is a negation that would be an integral part of the definition specifying the nature of something that is.<sup>17</sup> An external negation, by contrast, is a negative claim about an entity that is not included in the definition specifying its nature. Definitions specifying the nature of a thing neither entail nor are entailed by statements about the relation between that thing and other basic things. Thus, water can be a basic entity, and earth can be a basic entity, and they are different. The internal-external negations distinction allows one to say that earth differs from water without being committed to the claim that earth then is-not what it is to be water (or is what it is to be not-water), and thus avoids the forbidden assertion that earth is something that both is and is not. Each basic entity is defined independently and added to the list of what is, without its definition including its relations to the other genuinely real things. Thus, on this view, external negations do not entail internal negations.

I think that, given the unitary nature of *einai* at work in Parmenides, he cannot successfully maintain this distinction. I also think that he did not recognize the difficulty in his theory.<sup>18</sup> The problem in such an account becomes clear only later in the history of Greek philosophy.<sup>19</sup> That this seems incredible to us is not an objection to the view: Plato apparently constructs his account of the Forms in the same way. It is only in the late dialogues (*Parmenides*, *Sophist*) that Plato begins to explain the relations among Forms, and in doing so, sees that he must be able to find an acceptable way to distinguish claims about what a Form is in virtue of being the particular Form

<sup>16</sup> See Nehamas, "Being/Fire," p. 61. Nehamas makes the point in the course of objecting to my account of the *Doxa*. His claim is that "Parmenides must consider any two distinct entities, not just the traditional opposites, as enantiomorphs in Curd's sense." That is, what it is to be F is (in the strong sense) not what it is to be G.

<sup>17</sup> Although my discussion is in terms of definitions, this should not be taken to mean that the problems are merely verbal, not metaphysical. The sorts of definitions I mean are "real definitions," and so the negations that I discuss here would turn out to be part of the nature of a thing.

<sup>18</sup> Nor, apparently do the Pluralists and the Atomists. It may seem unwarranted to attribute such a confusion or misunderstanding to Parmenides and others. As I point out below, it requires a number of logical distinctions that only become clear in the work of Plato and Aristotle to see and understand this point.

<sup>19</sup> Thus, in the First Hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* (139b4–139e6), we find the character Parmenides arguing that the One cannot be the same or different because it is not so in virtue of itself (through being one). That is, the One can be only what it is in and of itself (and that is, being one). In the second Hypothesis (142b5–c2), Plato introduces a distinction between being F and having f at the level of the Forms, such that we can say that the One is (what it is to be) one, while having or partaking of being; it will also partake of sameness and difference.

that it is and claims about a Form's relations to other Forms. Making such distinctions requires the notions of substances, essences, and accidents.<sup>20</sup> I contend that it is only through wrestling with the problems posed by Parmenides' restrictions on the proper use of *esti* that later thinkers came to see the necessity of drawing such distinctions.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Locomotion and the Specification of How What-is Is

The internal-external negations distinction permits a plurality of unities, each of which is indivisibly what it is. Thus, the pluralists are not ignoring or rejecting Parmenides' requirements on what-is when they postulate a numerical plurality of basic entities. Nevertheless, it might well seem that any pluralist account that attempts to give a rational explanation of the sensible world will contradict the claim in lines B8.26–31 that what-is is *akinēton*. This is often taken as a denial of locomotion: Change of place is impossible and so the motion necessary for mixture and separation cannot take place.<sup>22</sup> That B8.41 includes change of place in the list of names that mortals unsuccessfully attempt to give to what-is lends further support to the claim that what-is must be motionless.<sup>23</sup> This is a strong objection (and indeed I worried about this while I was writing the book). Here is an outline of a response.

There is good reason for thinking that in lines B8.26–31 Parmenides argues against alteration in the nature of what-is rather than against the locomotion of anything that is, just as Mourelatos had suggested.<sup>24</sup> Although this is not the standard view, I think that the Homeric notion of *kinēsis* as *disruption* is what Parmenides intends here; in chapter II.2 I suggest other parallels to support that view. I take *kinēsis* as a general term covering various sorts of change. I would now suggest more strongly than I did earlier that Xenophanes B26 uses the same sense (see p. 87n.57). The *W*st line of B26 claims that the divine remains always in the same state (*tautōi*), not moving/changing (*kinoumenos ouden*);<sup>25</sup> the second line adds “nor is it *W*ting that he travel

<sup>20</sup> See Nehamas, “Being/Fire” p. 61 n.57; and Mann on “the discovery of things.” See also Kahn on Parmenides and Plato.

<sup>21</sup> Palmer gives an extended account of Parmenides' philosophical importance for Plato.

<sup>22</sup> See the review by Graham. Sedley says that according to the goddess's positive account “what-is will prove to be an everlasting, undifferentiated, motionless sphere” (“Parmenides,” p. 117). Sedley and I disagree on a number of crucial points in interpreting Parmenides; his lucid interpretation of the structure of the argument in Melissus B1–B4 makes better sense of those fragments than my account in Ch. V.

<sup>23</sup> Mourelatos, “Pluralists,” p. 126; Laks, “Vide.”

<sup>24</sup> As I note in Chapter II, in adopting this view of change, I follow the arguments of Mourelatos in *Route*.

<sup>25</sup> Most translators and commentators take *en + tautōi* as expressing a dative of place (“in the same place”); but I think it should be understood as a dative of state or condition.



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