

Simplicius, *On Aristotle On the Heavens III*, 556-558

556,1 Aristotle, p. 298b14: “For some of these [thinkers] completely abolished coming to be, and even destruction, having these arguments concerning the topic.”

5 The opinions concerning coming-to-be are distinguished in a fourfold fashion. Some [thinkers] completely abolish all generation, stating that all things are ungenerated, because of the fact that there is no knowledge of the things that come to be and pass away, since they are constantly flowing, as Parmenides and Melissus appeared to have said; others had the opposite opinion from these, such as Hesiod, who also stated that the first coming-to-be occurred of itself:

For truly Chaos was the first to come to be.

10 Others stated that other things come to be, stating that only a single common substrate was ungenerated, and the other things come to be from this (for example, Heraclitus stated this); yet others stated that no body is ungenerated, but all things come to be, although they are composed of things of equal status. The first opinions treated are those of Melissus and Parmenides, of whom the former stated that there is no coming-to-be at all, while the latter stated that coming-to-be does not occur in truth, but only in opinion. Because of this he
15 stated that other things merely appear to us [to come to be]. [Aristotle] says, however, that they may have spoken well about other things, for they thought rightly and divinely in regards to that the unity of being and noetic nature, and drew forth as a consequence that there cannot be science of those beings which are in coming-to-be and movement, inasmuch as they are always flowing. However, they [did not speak] “physically”, and they should be understood to be speaking as though philosophizing about those things which are above
20 nature. For it belongs to another prior philosophy to provide demonstrations concerning those other beings which are ungenerated and completely immobile, and which are the subjects of these thinkers' demonstrations; it does not pertain to physical speculation, which has as its object things subject to movement, for if nature is the principle of motion, those who eliminate motion eliminate nature along with those things which are by nature.

25 And why, someone might ask, can it not be said that they did not speak correctly about these physical matters qua physical? Did not Melissus and Parmenides both entitle their works “On Nature”? But this is not probable, for the word “nature” is common to both [kinds of discussions]: they were undertook to speak frequently of the nature of God, and we speak of the nature of things, and yet they spoke not only concerning those things above
30 nature, but also concerning physical things, in the very same writings, and because of this very reason they did not decline to speak of nature.

557,1 But Aristotle himself accused these thinkers of a fundamental error, and he was truly harsh in refuting them, even if he was correct: For on the one hand, he said, they did not accept the existence of anything other than the being of sensible things, and on the other hand
5 were the first to believe that it was necessary that certain of these natures be ungenerated and immobile, if there is to be scientific knowledge. For there is no knowledge of things always flowing, and Parmenides agrees with Plato in stating that neither is there anywhere to which one can turn his thought, such that he possess [truth], save [to] the being of the everlasting fundamental ideas. Therefore, thinking these things, they went too far, and applied to sensible and generable things the arguments adapted to noetic and immobile things, if in fact
10 they who, proposing to speak “on nature”, say anything which befits such beings. And if

Melissus wrote “On Nature” or “On Being”, it is clear that he supposed that nature is being and physical things [are] beings, and that these are sensible.

15 And in this regard, Aristotle equally stated that these [philosophers] accepted no other being other than that of sensible things, because they stated being to be one. For in thinking that there was being of the palpably sensible, if being is one, there would be nothing else besides it. Melissus, for his part, says that “if it were, it would be one: if it were two, it could not be unlimited, but [the two] would have limits in regards to each other”, while Parmenides says

It is entirely one of a kind, immovable and unbegotten.*

20 But Aristotle, as is his custom, replied to the current arguments in regards to the phenomenon, thinking ahead so that superficial arguments might not lead astray; he says that these men proposed a twofold hypostasis, on the one hand that of the true being of thought, and on the other hand that of the generated and sensible, this latter not being considered worthy of being called “true being”, but rather “apparent being”. Because of this they said that there is truth concerning being, whereas concerning that which comes to be there is [only] opinion. Indeed, Parmenides says:

25 And it is right that you should learn all things
both the persuasive, unshaken heart of Objective Truth,
and the subjective beliefs of mortals, in which there is no true trust.
558,1 But you shall learn these too: how, for the mortals
passing through them, the things-that-seem must
‘really exist’, being, for them, all there is.

But in order to complement his argument concerning true being, and improve that which concerns the sensible, he continued his instruction:

5 Here I stop my trustworthy speech to you and thought
about Objective Truth. From here on, learn the subjective beliefs of mortals;
listen to the deceptive ordering of my words.

And to communicate the proper ordering for sensible beings, he taught further:

10 Thus, according to belief, these things were born and now are,
and hereafter, having grown from this, they will come to an end.
And for each of these did humans establish a distinctive name.

15 How is it, then, that Parmenides posited that only sensible things exist, philosophizing these sorts of things concerning the noetic, which are even superfluous to mention? How does he make that which is fitting for thinkable things carry over to sensible things, he who taught on the one hand the union of the thinkable and the truly real, and on the other manifestly treated of the proper ordering of the sensible, not deeming it worthy to call it by the name of being?

* The translation of Parmenides’s “On Nature” is from Allan Randall’s version, available at <http://www.elea.org/Parmenides/>. (c) 1996 Allan Randall.

20 But Melissus also, by way of conversation, wrote more clearly, and disclosed his judgement on these matters, and not in fewer words. In regard to being, he taught that it is one and ungenerated and immobile and is separated from any void, but the entirety of it is full. “The greatest sign is this *logos*: that One alone is, but there are also other signs: for if it were many, all those sorts of things would themselves necessarily be what in fact I claim the one to be. For if there exist earth and water and air and the silver and gold and fire and things
25 which are first living then dead, and black and white and the rest of such things, as many things as men claim to truly exist, if these things indeed exist, and we see and hear rightly, then each of these things will have to exist just as it first appeared to us, and may not change nor become other, but each must always be just that which in fact it is. Now, we say that we
30 hear and see and understand rightly, and it seems to us that the hot becomes cold and the cold becomes hot, and the hard becomes soft and the soft hard, and the living dies and from that
559,1 which is not alive life springs, and all these things are differentiated, and what they were and are now are not the same at all, but rather [we say that] both the silver which is hard to the
5 touch becomes exhausted in flowing, as do both gold and stone and all that which seems to be strong, and that both earth and stone come to be from water: thus it happens that we neither see nor know them to be beings. However, these statements do not agree with each other. For of the things which are said to be many and eternal and visible and having strength, all appear to us to become different and undergo changes from their respective appearances. It is therefore obvious that we do not perceive correctly, nor do these things
10 appear correctly to be many. For they would not change if they truly were, but would be just the same sort as each appears to be. For none [of these] was greater in position than a true being, nor further would any come to be a being. Thusly, therefore, if all [these things were], they would have to be the same kind of things as the One, in fact, is.”

15 Thus, this thinker also explained the cause wisely, by stating that sensibles are not, but only seem to be. How, then, would someone who has stated these things then state that only that which is sensible exists? But he also eliminates coming-to-be from that which truly is: for concerning that issue, Parmenides also stated:

Thus, coming-to-be is extinguished and perishing unheard of.

20 Both Melissus as well Parmenides [agree]: they explained wisely the coming-to-be of sensible things; Melissus, on the one hand, in these words: “the hot becomes cold” and also “from water and earth and stone [things] come to be”; Parmenides, on the other hand, analyzed the principles of the sensible, stating:

And you shall learn how Earth and Sun and Moon
and the aether common to all, the Milky Way and the outermost heaven,
25 and the hot force of the stars did surge forth
to come to be,

560,1 and he taught about the genesis of things that come to be and pass away, even that of the parts of living creatures. It is nonetheless clear, as Parmenides was not unaware, that the generated itself is, as well as that he had two feet, despite his assertion that being is one. But what in fact Aristotle well and clearly taught in the *Metaphysics* is that “it appears that the insight of Parmenides was deeper,” and this is completely in accord with the argument which Aristotle customarily adduces concerning phenomena.

5 Alexander puts these arguments into a syllogism thusly: the sensibles are the only
beings; science is of beings; that of which there is science is immobile; thus the sensibles are
immobile. In this regard, Aristotle said, in following the argument they stated true things
concerning immobile beings, but were carried away concerning sensible things, and did not
10 [argue] soundly. As a result, it happens that in arguing non-physically about physical things,
they destroyed nature [physis].