

**Describe Parmenides' vision of the nature of Reality. What are the implications of that vision for the activity of metaphysical inquiry?**

Parmenides' vision of the nature of Reality gives impetus to and challenges metaphysical inquiry. His use of deductive reasoning to arrive at a finite, motionless, timeless reality with no imperfections serves as an impetus to metaphysical inquiry. By relegating plurality, motion and sensual perception to the "unreal", Parmenides also questions what his predecessors took for granted. In the face of Parmenides' reality, motion and plurality, require proof. Their existence can no longer be taken for granted. On the other hand, his use of unfettered reason raises serious questions about the use of reason in an uncritical manner regardless of how logically impeccable an argument may be.

To investigate what implications Parmenides' vision of the nature of reality has for metaphysical inquiry, what constitutes metaphysical inquiry must be investigated followed by a discussion of Parmenides' revolutionary vision of reality and its impact on his contemporaries, successors and metaphysical inquiry.

What constitutes metaphysics has expanded and changed over time, yet some areas of inquiry continue to persist. To ancient philosophers metaphysics included "things that do not change", "first causes of things" and "nature of being". Contemporaneously this has expanded to include other areas such as free will. This and other changes and/or additions have directly influenced the manner in which one investigates metaphysical phenomena. Nonetheless, an underlying reality which remains constant is still a focus of metaphysics.

Furthermore, metaphysics can be positive or negative. Positive metaphysics focuses on proving necessities while negative metaphysics argues against those necessities. The two are not necessarily contradictory as arguing against necessities may also involve proving other necessities. In skeptically viewing imperfection, plurality and motion, Parmenides presents a negative metaphysics, but his assertion of what reality is is also a necessary proof of what reality is, as it conveys the notion that the world must be a certain way, therefore, negating other "mights".

Parmenides of Elea, who was active in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, is the founder of Eleatic philosophy, a philosophy that asserts that change, time, and plurality cannot be naively presumed. According to Diogenes Laertius, Parmenides only composed one poem of which only fragments survived. More specifically, it was of a journey to the temple of a goddess, who bestows wisdom upon him. She presents Parmenides with two paths of inquiry or ways of understanding. The first path is the way of truth or persuasion, "The one, that [it] is and that it is not impossible for [it] not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for she attends upon Truth)." (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, page 245)

What is possible, what is not, is not possible and thus cannot be thought. Consequently Parmenides' Being is also thought. More succinctly as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote, "Thought generates thought. Thought is identical with being."

If something is, it cannot move, perish, or change nor can it have any imperfections. If something comes into being than it was not being and therefore, is not. Thus the world can be construed as a finite unity, the Parmenidean One. According to Parmenides reality is "like the bulk of a ball well-rounded on every side, equally balanced in every direction from the centre" (Kirk, Raven, and

Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, page 252). Therefore, to exist everywhere it has to be a whole, uniform and perfect, representing a perfect unity.

The second path is, “the other, that [it] is not and that it is needful that [it] not be, that I declare to you is an altogether indiscernible track: for you could not know what is not – that cannot be done – nor indicate it” (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* page 245).

It is not possible to say something is not. If something is not, then one cannot think it and it cannot exist. Thus if one cannot think about what is not, then one cannot talk about plurality. For example, something can be yellow, but not green and not blue. Consequently yellow, green, and blue are not the same as one another. It is impossible to think them all. More importantly, there is no room for appearances and commonsense in Parmenides’ reality. Sensual reality is not. Time, past and future are also not as they would represent the coming to be and passing away, which is unacceptable to Parmenides. Differences arise only when words and concepts are applied to reality.

According to Parmenides, there are also those that compromise or believe in the is and is not, “but then from that on which mortals wander knowing nothing, two-headed; for helplessness guides the wandering thought in their breasts, and they are carried along, deaf, and blind at once, dazed, indiscriminating hordes, who believe that that to be and not to be are the same and not the same; and the path taken by them is all backward-turning.” (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, page 247)

The “two headed” mortals who believe they can make use of both paths are most people, who according to Parmenides are wandering aimlessly and away for the true nature of reality.

Parmenides deduces that the only way to understanding the nature of reality is through logical reasoning. By presenting this revolutionary vision of reality, he brought into question many of his predecessors’ theories like Thales, Anaximander, and Heraclitus, who took motion and plurality for granted. They aimed at explaining motion and plurality, yet Parmenides takes a step back and denies the existence of that motion and plurality in a manner that is difficult to refute. His predecessors and contemporaries challenged tradition and mythopoeic explanations by way of reasoned arguments. Parmenides questioned their arguments by taking reason a step further. His attempt to use pure deductive reasoning may have influenced others to revisit earlier visions of reality in response to his logically constructed vision.

Furthermore, Parmenides had a significant influence on a number of philosophers that came after him. Both Aristotle and Plato, understood that Parmenides was the first to apprehend that understanding what is unchanging is a different order epistemologically than subjects that change. Euclides of Megara a contemporary of Socrates tried to combine the Parmenidean Being with Socrates’ ethics, arguing that the good or justice, are always the same, i.e. identified as Being. Parmenides may have objected to Euclides’ approach, accusing him of ‘wandering understanding’, of compromising between what is and what is not. Nonetheless his influence is more than evident.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel credited Parmenides with commencing philosophy properly, “Parmenides began Philosophy proper. A man now constitutes himself free from all ideas and opinions, denies their truth, and says necessity alone, Being is the truth.”

The nature of reality is in itself. The only thing that can be said is that it is or whatever follows logically from the proposition that it is. The nature of reality is indescribable. Although, this reality may seem unattainable, it does give impetus to looking beyond appearances, looking beneath the surface, and critically questioning or deeply considering the nature of reality.

In conclusion, Parmenides' revolutionary nature of reality championed unfettered reason and challenged other theories, which took motion and plurality for granted. It also prompted others to view his theories in a critically reasoned manner. In other words, he revealed the power of reason and a glimpse into understanding that which does not change, yet he also touched upon the limits of reason to understanding reality.