# "Everything One": The Unity of All Things in Ancient Greek Philosophical Thought

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Sang Hun Lee in his marvelous book *Fundamentals of Unification Thought* of "The Unification Thought Institute" of Japan, dedicates a few pages, surprisingly in the middle and at the end rather than at the beginning of his book, to the ancient Greek pioneers on the subject. In the closing eleventh chapter, under the title "Methodology", both in Part I "Historical Review" and Part III "An Appraisal of Traditional Conventional Methodologies from the Perspective of Unification Thought", the author briefly refers to Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In the "Historical Review" he calls Heraclitus' dialectic "The Dynamic Method", Socrates' dialectic "The Method of Dialogue", Plato's dialectic "The Method of Division", Zeno's dialectic "The Static Method" and, avoiding the term 'dialectic', he describes Aristotle's method as "Deductive". In Part III of the same chapter he approaches these same ancient Greek thinkers from the perspective of 'Unification Thought'.

Strangely enough though, he omits Parmenides from Elea of South Italy ('Magna Grecia' ), the famous pupil of Xenophanes from Colophon, one of the 12 cities of the Ionian confederation of Asia Minor. Parmenides, to whom Plato devotes one of the 'later' dialogues under the title of his name ( *Parmenides* ) and also refers to as 'father Parmenides' in his *Sophist*, another of the more influential 'later' dialogues, written and classified just after *Parmenides*, is the first Greek philosopher to have thought that 'everything is one' ( or Ἓν τό πᾶν, in the original ).

Before we proceed to elaborate on Parmenides' teaching, let us take a look at his life; we draw information from the works of Plato, Aristotle, Diogenes Laertius, Iamblichos, the dictionary of *Suda*, and other minor sources. He was born at about 515 B.C., a few years before the establishment of the democracy in Athens. He is said to have successfully legislated for his native city of Elea and later, c. 450 B.C., to have visited Athens in his sixty–fifth year (*Parmenides* 127b). He proved to be the greatest representative of the Eleatic School of Philosophy, initiated by his teacher Xenophanes. As Plato says, Parmenides made upon the young Socrates the impression of a personality

that inspired respect and fear (*Theaitetus* 183e). Like his teacher Xenophanes, Parmenides expressed his teaching in a long philosophical poem in hexameters under the title *On Nature* (*Περί Φύσεως,* which Cicero[1][1] described as 'inept' in form), and survives only with the introduction and some large fragments. It starts with the allegorical narration of a chariot–journey, taken by the initiate poet– speaker, obviously from the world of daytime living to a strange place, where day and night cross paths and opposites are undivided in one. Here he is welcomed by a goddess whose address forms the remainder of a didactic poem. She cautions him to cease relying on ordinary beliefs, examples of which she readily offers. Her address is sound and attends closely to logic.

As the goddess explains, there are three ways of thinking: that 'it ***is***' (ἐστί), that 'it is ***not***' (οὐκ ἐστί), and that 'it both ***is*** and is ***not***' (ἐστί καί οὐκ ἐστί – which derives from Heraclitus). She denounces the last two and accepts only the first (τό εἶναι; being), which she describes in detail. It is 'a logical rigorous deduction of the characteristics of what ***is*** from the premises that 'it is'. In other words, what ***is*** is without beginning or end; single, motionless, continuous, determined, unchangeable, like a wholesome sphere'[2][2]. Thus, Parmenides turns away from the traditional Ionian cosmogony, in order to attempt something fundamentally different; a deduction of the character of what ***is*** from the requirement of thought and language. It follows that the difference and the diversity of nature exists only in name; and the goddess now, starting anew and explicitly rejecting the monism of earlier physicists, derives our acceptance of experience as true from an original convention to name two contrasting forms (Light and Darkness), thus unfolding a cosmology which is no longer her own divine revelation but an historical account of the world according to human belief. Besides the proem of the poem is suffused with religious language and one can erroneously conclude that an initiation in reason is being substituted for the perception–suffused initiations of religious cult. The poem consisted of two parts. The former contains Parmenides' doctrine *On Truth* (*Περί ἀληθείας*) and the latter deals with the world of self–deception, i.e. the fallacy of the world of the senses and the erroneous perception of human beings based upon it.

As the goddess categorically states, 'You cannot say or think that 'it is not''. In other words, thought and speech must have an object that is there to be talked or thought about. Martha Nussbaum, on the other hand[3][3], develops this thought further; on this basis, she concludes not only that nothingness or non existence cannot figure in our

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[1][1] Cicero, *Acad.* II 74 ( 'ἄτεχνος' ).

[2][2] Alan Hartley Coxon in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary, s.v.* 'Parmenides' (1949).

[3][3] Ibid. (1996).

speech, but also that temporal change, internal qualitative variation, and even plurality are all unsayable and unthinkable – on the grounds that to talk about all these will commit the speaker to making contrasts and entail the use of negative language. In terms of cosmogony, we have to accept that what ***is*** had a beginning in time, there must have been a reason for that beginning and there can be no reason for something which was not previously. From the teaching of the goddess it follows logically that the diversity of nature exists only in name and has to do with thought and language. Thus, Parmenides' account of ways of thought constitutes the earliest discussion of method in philosophy. His rejection of the third way (the Heraclitean[4[4]] 'it both ***is*** and is ***not***') leads to the discovery of the law of contradiction.

Contemporary with Parmenides, the Ephesian pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (c. 544 – 484 B.C.) whom Hegel called 'the father of Dialectic', bases his notion of 'it ***is*** and is ***not***' upon the argument of the constant change of things; 'Everything is in a state of flux – τά πάντα ῥεῖ, μένει δέ παγίως οὐδέν' ('nothing endures for ever'), thus ascribing the cause of development of things to the struggle of opposites. Things develop only through the harmonious give-and-receive action between correlative elements. Nevertheless, there is something eternally unchangeable and perpetually stable. That is the very material essence of the universe, Fire (Πῦρ), the dynamic expression of the world. This in cosmological terms implies 'the stable statement of the universe' and, in theological terms, it implies God - '*Deus sive Natura*' ( 'God or Nature' ).

On this issue the famous German classicist Werner Jaeger, in his *Paideia*[5[5]], maintains that Parmenides, with the teaching of his εἶναι (to be), attacks Anaximander anonymously as well as 'almost all the Ionian philosophers of nature, and probably even more Pythagoras on the issue, but there is no indisputable evidence'. Only the part of Heraclitus on the stable Logos coincides with Parmenides' doctrine. Later the sophists in Athens will develop the main stream of thought of the Eleatic philosopher, while Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle will refine to perfection the idealistic notions of objective and eternal permanence of Parmenides' εἶναι, contrary to the sophists' insistence on the subjective and changeable aspect of things (e.g. Protagoras' 'Man is the measure for all things' vs. Plato's 'God is the measure all things').

As for the successors and the followers, the most eminent were Melissos and Zeno, to whom we shall return shortly. The greatest of all Greek philosophers, Plato and

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4[4] *Fragm.* (K. – D.) 16, 21, 26, 27, 85, 114.

5[5] *Die Formung des Griechischen Menschen,* English translation by G. Highet, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, Part III,* Oxford 1945.

Aristotle, dealt extensively and repeatedly with his views, while 'Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus felt the need to respond to his arguments in defending plurality and change, though they did so without addressing his fundamental concern about language and thought. The core of his argument thus remained untouched until Plato's *Sophist,* in which the Eleatic stranger proposes a new understanding of the relation between language and world, in order to break the strong grip of the argument [...] of Parmenides'[6[6]].

The long list of commentators on Parmenides' teaching, especially of the 'One Everything' argument, includes Xenophanes the Chalkedonian (c. 395 – 315 B.C.), a pupil of the Old Academy and personal friend of Plato, in his *Testimonies, Doctrines and Fragments*, Aristotle of Stageira, Macedonia (384 – 322 B.C.), the founder of The Lyceum in Athens in his *Physics* and in *Interpretation,* Theophrastus from Lesbos (373 – 288 B.C.) in his *Opinions on Physics,* Philo the Jew (25 B.C. – A.D. 50 ) in his *Laws of Allegories*, Plutarch from Chaironia (A.D. 45 – 125) in his *Against Colotes,* Pseudo-Plutarch ( post 2nd Century A.D.) in his *Placita Philosophorum,* Aetius (1st-2nd centuries A.D.) in his *Placitis reliquiae ( Stobaei excerpta ),* Pseudo – Galenus (post 2nd Century A.D.) in his work on *History of Philosophy,* Alexander the philosopher (2nd – 3rd centuries A.D.) in his *Commentaries on Aristotle's Metaphysics,* Themistius (A.D. 320 – 390) in his work *Paraphrasis of Aristotle's Physics* and the Christian theologian and Ecclesiastic author Eusebius (4th Century A.D.) in his *Praeparatio Evangelica.*

Let us return now to the main successors and continuers of Parmenides' thought. Melissos of Samos (5th Century B.C.), the last distinguished member of the Eleatic School of Philosophy, following Parmenides, also saw reality as changeless and single, but he went further, describing it as boundless and of infinite extension in the past and future, while maintaining that it is incorporeal and denying the existence of void and of motion.

Zeno of Elea (490 – 430 B.C.), on the other hand, is portrayed by Plato[7[7]] as a pupil and friend of Parmenides. Zeno became famous mainly for the arguments in his four paradoxes about motion, paraphrased by Aristotle[8[8]], who, according to Diogenes Laertius[9[9]], declared him 'the father of Dialectic'. He, like Parmenides, rejects the hypothesis of plurality.

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6[6] Martha Nussbaum, *O.C.D., s.v.*'Parmenides'.

7[7] *Parmenides* 127b.

8[8] *Physics* 6.9.

9[9] Diogenes Laertius 8.59.

In conclusion, Parmenides played a leading role in the history of philosophy for the above reasons, but remained immortal for his fragment about the identity of εἶναι (to be) and νοεῖν (to think)[10[10]].

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[10[10]] *Fragm.* 5 (K. – D): 'τό γάρ αὐτό νοεῖν ἐστί τε καί εἶναι'.