

Parmenides

Parmenides of Elea was one of the most important presocratic philosophers. He wrote a poem called "On Nature" in which a goddess instructs him. The Goddess tells him about truth and things that exist and don't exist. The truth is what is whole, complete and unchanging. Mortal beliefs are based on sense experience and are not trustworthy because they cannot be genuinely known. Parmenides' ideas are hard to understand because he thinks that the changing world is not metaphysical and gives a cosmology.

In fragment 2, Parmenides says "the only ways of inquiry there are for thinking: the one, the it is and that it is not possible for it not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon truth), the other that it is not and that it is necessary for it not to be, this I point out to you to be a path completely unlearnable, for neither may you know that which is not (for it is not to be accomplished) nor may you declare it." This is the first premise that Parmenides uses when he comes to talk about what is and what is not in fragment 8. Parmenides also says that it is not possible for what is not to be spoken about or thought of. He begins by drawing a distinction between things and states of affairs. He then argues by a perception analogy that because it is not possible to see things that do not exist, it is not possible to speak about things that do not exist. He does not argue that it is not possible for states of affairs not to be spoken about and this is a flaw in his argument. He also forgets to argue that things cannot be thought of.

Parmenides thinks that what is has the following features. First, it is ungenerated and imperishable. Secondly, it is indivisible and continuous. Third, it is unchanging and immovable. Fourth, it is one. Fifth, it is like a sphere.

He argues that what is must be ungenerated because it must not come into existence from what is not. This is because of the perception analogy. It also cannot come into being from what is because it is already what is and there is no reason for it to come into being. This is because of the principle of sufficient reason. One problem with this argument is that Parmenides does not distinguish between the different types of existence. This undermines his argument. Another problem with this argument is that the perception analogy fails because thinking is not like perceiving.

Parmenides was a great philosopher so it is a pity that his ideas are wrong. What he says about what is is not in accordance with common sense. However, he made a significant contribution to Philosophy because what he says is very original and lots of other philosophers reacted to it.