

**A SUCCINCT POSITING OF
PARMENIDEAN BEING OVER THE
ONTOLOGY OF *TIMEUS***

**UN PLANTEAMIENTO SUCINTO DEL
SER PARMENÍDEO SOBRE LA
ONTOLOGÍA DEL *TIMEO***

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Abstract

As understood by the philosopher Parmenides, and as supported by Jaspers' interpretation, Being, or the ontological grounding of all, establishes that there is always something rather than nothing. Accordingly, we readers would be right to claim that since there is always something rather than nothing, Parmenides' Being is exempt from causation. In other words, Being, as uncaused, is an integral principle of Parmenides' philosophy, and all that follows from Being is Being. Similarly, if we turn to Plato's *Timaeus*, we readers find that the crafter, or demiurge of our cosmos, is exempt from causation too; however, the universe is a product of causation, and thus is not eternal for its coming-to-be serves as evidence of its potential for demise. Yet, who are we to follow, and why, regarding the universe's ontological status as everlasting or able to decay, Parmenides, or Plato? First, this piece will describe Parmenides' metaphysics of Being along with the aid of Jaspers' writings on this Pre-Socratic. Next, this essay will then turn to Plato's treatment of ontology using key excerpts from *Timaeus*. Finally, this article will provide support for Parmenides' doctrine of Being over Plato's division between necessary being and the universe of becoming.

Keywords: History of Philosophy, Metaphysics, Ontology, Parmenides, Plato, Jaspers.

Resumen

Tal y como lo entendió el filósofo Parménides, y tal y como lo apoya la interpretación de Jaspers, el Ser, o el fundamento ontológico de todo, establece que siempre hay algo

y no nada. En consecuencia, los lectores tendríamos razón al afirmar que, puesto que siempre hay algo y no nada, el Ser de Parménides está exento de causalidad. En otras palabras, el Ser, en tanto que incausado, es un principio integral de la filosofía de Parménides, y todo lo que se sigue del Ser es el Ser. Del mismo modo, si nos dirigimos al Timeo de Platón, los lectores encontrarán que el Creador, o Demiurgo de nuestro cosmos, también está exento de causalidad; pero, el universo es un producto de la causalidad, y por lo tanto no es eterno, ya que su llegada a ser sirve como evidencia de su potencial de desaparición. Sin embargo, ¿a quién debemos seguir, y por qué, en lo que respecta al estatus ontológico del universo como eterno o capaz de decaer, a Parménides o a Platón? En primer lugar, este artículo describirá la metafísica del Ser de Parménides con la ayuda de los escritos de Jaspers sobre este presocrático. Este trabajo tratará la ontología de Platón utilizando extractos clave del Timeo. Finalmente, este artículo proporcionará apoyo a la doctrina del Ser de Parménides sobre la división de Platón entre el ser necesario y el universo del devenir.

Palabras clave: Historia de la Filosofía, Metafísica, Ontología, Parménides, Platón, Jaspers.

Introduction

Throughout the history of ontology, questions abound as to the ontological and causal relation between the necessary and the contingent. Accordingly, to contribute to this philosophical riddle, it is the intent of this present essayist to briefly argue for the necessity of Being over contingency regarding the ontological status of the universe. Now, to accomplish this end this present author will limit readers' considerations to Jaspers' writings on Parmenides, the words of Parmenides himself, and statements made by the character Timaeus in the Platonic dialogue of the same name.

Parmenides on Being and Jaspers on Parmenidean Ontology

Parmenides of Elea, the philosopher-poet of the surviving fragments entitled "On Nature", begins his philosophical prose, with a depiction of the odyssey of the thinker's journey from ignorance, or the way of simple seeming to that of the way of knowledge, or that of "well-rounded truth" referred to as *aletheia* (Parmenides, 1984, pp. 4, 6-7), (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, p. 9). In other words, Parmenides, as stated by Jaspers, is one who submits we readers to consider two perspectives; one being the way of what Being truly is, versus the way of mere opinion, *doxa*, or that all-too-common everyday manner of how we consider things that exist (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, pp. 19-20).

So, from the vantage of Parmenides, and as bolstered by Jaspers, we readers find that Parmenides beseeches us to take the path of *aletheia*, so that we may know that all that is, is and that all that is not, is an impossibility once considered through the lens of this all-encompassing perspective, aimed toward comprehensive truth, and

the effects such possession of truth may lead us to (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, p. 19-20).

Accordingly, we readers find ways in which Parmenides grounds Being as being all that is whereas nothingness is impossible for it can never truly pan out logically upon reflection. That is because much like double-negation in mathematics Parmenides states, in reference to Being: “The one—that *[it]*is, and that *[it]* cannot not be”. (Parmenides, 1984, p. 55). In other words, Being either is or is not, and therefore still something; however, why is this so?

One reason as to why Being is always something and never nothing is that since all that is, is thinkable, communicable, perceivable, and nameable, we find that for something to not be, it would necessarily be unthinkable, incommunicable, unperceivable, as well as absent of being nameable (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, pp. 19-21). However, all that we encounter can never meet all four of these aforesaid standards, and as such, since all that is, falls under the categories of being thinkable or communicable or perceivable or nameable, we find that to Parmenides nothingness is, in fact, unreal (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, pp. 19-21). Lastly, because we cannot establish the truth of nothingness, we readers find that Jaspers leads us to another Parmenidean concept; namely, the idea that such tests of Being constitute argumentative, or logical signs that Being truly is, or that the *semata* of Being leads us to *aletheia*, and consequently, such sureness of the truth of Being may further leads us to *hesychia*, or a fundamental peace of mind produced by the knowing of Being’s fullness (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, pp. 19-21).

Moreover, another outcome of following the *semata* of Being, aside from *aletheia* and *hesychia*, is that because nothing is not, and thus still something, Being is neither born nor can Being expire (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, pp. 19-20). That is because if we state that Being can emerge from a pre-existing being, and is thus born, we are, in fact, stating a logical mistake. That is if we embrace the claim that Being originates from a prior being, we are stating that Being was once not, but now is, which is impossible since if nothing were ever truly real, nothing would only be able to lead to nothingness (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966). Also, since there is no reason for nothing to be, for if nothing were real it would necessarily be void of all qualities of its opposite, Being, then nothing would issue from nothing, which can never be that which can cause Being (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966).

Likewise, Being cannot expire, or extinguish; for, Being has no alternate concept that it can truly fall into for it to be completely nil (Jaspers and Arendt, 1996). That is, if Being were to demise, it would necessarily be other than what it is, and as such that would equate to meaning that nothingness is real, when, in fact, it is logically impossible for nothing to be (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, pp. 19-20). Accordingly, Being, by not possessing any alternate concept to pass into, cannot die and because Being is also unborn, it is, to Parmenides, and as understood by Jaspers, a unique indivisibility, One, or monistic entity, (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966; Copleston, 1993). Finally, let us now consider the consequences that arise from what we name the differentia of Parmenides' Being to be, that path of mere mortals, of seeming, or of appearance (Parmenides, 1984, pp. 6-7; Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, pp. 22-23).

So, as understood by Parmenides through support from Jaspers, we readers find that aside from the path of *aletheia*, there is the everyday common, or base

understanding of reality and existence that constitutes that which leads to opinion, or *doxa*, alone (Jaspers and Arendt). That is, within Parmenides' "On Nature", we readers find that we mistakenly label things as being separate from Being, when we declare something to be in a space and time that is distinct from all other instances of space and time (Parmenides, 1984). However, such a labeling on our part is erroneous; for, Being as everywhere the same, and as solo and thus indivisible is absent from no space or time (Parmenides, 1984).

Instead, Being as ever-present is within and throughout all time, as "continuous", while atemporal, and thus unfazed by the effects of time. (Parmenides, 1984). As such, when we impose names on what appears in space and time, as being separate, we are limiting space and time in a way that is logically absurd; for, Being as everywhere the same, is everywhere always, and thus verily is, while when we limit things present in Being, we are claiming that Being is not everywhere the same always. Thus, when we name things as being distinct from one another, we are, in fact, stating that Being is and is not selfsame at one and the same time, effectively defying the axiom of contradiction as stated by Jaspers (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966).

Plato's take on Being, Becoming, and the Universe's Duration

If we enter Plato's *Timaeus*, we readers find a stark contrast made by the character Timaeus; namely, between that which "always is, but never comes to be" and that which "comes to be, but never is". (Plato, 1984, p. 16) In other words, Plato establishes in the *Timaeus* an eternal, uncaused element of reality and existence, that serves as a foundational starting point for all that is, to become what we know to be the "visible and tangible universe" (Plato, 1984, p. 20).

Now, such a being, that “always is but never comes to be”, amounts to be the crafter, or demiurge of the universe, while what “comes to be, but never is,” is the universe for it is indeed in a state of becoming to Plato’s *Timaeus* (Plato, 1984). The knowledge of the differences between these two factors of reality and existence are accessible to us via a “reasoned account” as well as through “unreasoning sensation”, or that the eternal, uncaused demiurge we can speculate about through considering all that is by pure reason alone, whereas what we take to be our universe is best examinable by the perceptions we possess that regard things that are in a state of flux (Plato, 1984).

So, why, and how is it that this permanent feature of reality and existence, the crafter, causes the universe to be? Well, we readers first find that to Plato’s *Timaeus* the universe must be a product of an orderly necessary being, since a mark of things caused is that their changeableness indicates that they are not permanent, and as impermanent they are subject to demise, and by being subject to demise they necessarily possess a beginning (Plato, 1984). Accordingly, since all we sense in the universe is in such a state of impermanency, or that we know that we know all things alter based upon the perceptions we possess of the cosmos, all that is, must derive from something that engendered it of which it is that engenderer’s copy (Plato, 1984). Lastly, this engenderer, to Plato, is the eternal crafter of the universe who, as all-good, or unjealous and thus unbegrudging, attempted to make the universe as near to itself as something caused can possibly be (Plato, 1984).

That is, despite the all-good intention of the demiurge, to make the universe as perfect as itself, we may still infer that our universe as a “visible and tangible” copy of this “eternal being” by being caused, or “corporeal”, as asserted by Plato’s *Timaeus*, is

of a lesser degree of perfection than that which is totally absent of corporeality; the demiurge and “*intelligible* living beings,” or Forms that are absent of ageing, and therefore exempt from generation too, and hence, atemporal. (Plato, 1984). Thus, these entities, uncaused, to Plato’s *Timaeus* constitute the “eternal model”, or molds that the demiurge, or crafter had in mind, so to speak, as issuing forth from the *Nous* due to the demiurge’s preference for order over a hodgepodge of chaotic basic material elements displaying no harmoniousness (Plato, 1984).

Moreover, after we readers encounter a discussion of how it is that the universe’s crafter organized such basic material elements of existence by the “eternal model”, or paradigm of intellect, or rationality, we find that such a designer of the universe came to form time along with the universe’s coming-to-be. (Plato, 1984). Now, time, to Plato’s *Timaeus*, as the moving likeness, or image of eternity, applies to the “visible and tangible” organized universe alone for the demiurge as crafter is exempt from the effects of time, just as all Platonic Forms that are an outcome of the agency, or efficiency of this everlasting demiurge, are as well. (Plato, 1984). Such an interpretation of time is evident when Plato’s *Timaeus* asserts that “time was created along with the universe” and additionally when this same character *Timaeus* states, in regard to the organized universe, that it “will be for all time” but not “for all eternity” (Plato, 1984, p. 26).

Parmenides’ Being over Plato’s Ontology of the Universe

One argument that we readers may consider, asserting Parmenides’ schema of Being over Plato’s division between the demiurge, as eternal being and the universe, its product, as in a state of becoming, is that Plato’s *Timaeus* defies the axiom of

contradiction, when he asserts that there is a pre-existing Being, prior to the universe that can craft chaotic matter into what amounts to be our cosmos (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, p. 25; Plato, 1984). That is because if a crafter, or demiurge crafted the universe, it would indicate that this demiurge is and is not selfsame at one and the same time.

For, if a crafter, or demiurge is that which is outside causation, it would already be Being and could never produce anything other than itself, such as the Platonic depiction of the orderly universe of becoming as an outcome of the crafter, or demiurge as its cause (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966; Plato, 1984). That is because if such Being is distinct from a fashioned becoming universe, as Plato's *Timaeus* upholds, when the character Timaeus declares that the uncaused crafter, or demiurge caused a universe of flux, then that Being is, in fact, causing something that is unlike itself, or something that is both of Being but also of Non-Being at one and the same (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966; Plato, 1984). Accordingly, Parmenides as understood by Jaspers would charge that because there must be a likeness that unifies all that is, or Being, then Plato's crafter, or demiurge proves to be something that defies the axiom of contradiction, if there is a divide between the uncaused and the so-called caused aspects of reality and existence.

However, from where does this mistaken understanding of Being arise? Well, we readers may first look to the claim of Plato's *Timaeus* stating that the crafter, or demiurge produced a universe of becoming to be in its image, which is erroneously stating that an acausal Being, apart from the so-called caused universe of becoming, limits itself as time and space so that that caused universe of becoming can be as akin to it as possible, or its image (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966). Yet, Plato's *Timaeus's* crafter, or demiurge, or uncaused Being, as we also find in Parmenides, cannot be in the

confines, or limits of time and space, since the crafter, or demiurge is eternal and, like Being, serves as the ultimate limit of time and space (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966, p. 20). Thus, how can it be that what is the ultimate limit of all reality and existence, the crafter, or demiurge to Plato's *Timaeus* become something limited, when understood as investing itself into causing the universe of becoming to be its image (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966; Plato, 1984).

As such, if we declare that the universe is in a state of becoming whereas its designer is in a state of immutable Being, we are either mislabeling the nature of the universe or Being. However, such mislabeling cannot apply to Being to Parmenides, since Being alone as even throughout and everywhere the same via reason is exempt from change (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966). Lastly, it is we who mistakenly take the universe to be in a state of becoming, like Plato's *Timaeus*, that we fail to attend to the *semata* of Being as Parmenides would assert, and as such we fail to know "well-rounded truth", or *aletheia* of the universe as being of Being, and thus permanently continuous and that it is we who divide the universe, like Plato's *Timaeus*, when we attend to the way of appearance of "mere mortals" alone (Jaspers and Arendt, 1966).

Conclusion

The purpose of this short article was to introduce to readers basic elements of the ontology of Parmenides and Plato's *Timaeus*. However, this brief paper also sought to advocate for Parmenides' view of ontology over that of Plato's *Timaeus*. That is because Parmenides' strict adherence to Being avoids defying the axiom of contradiction as well as shows how it is that divisions between Being are, in fact, farcical; for, such divides amount to be mislabeling on the part of we "mere mortals"

(Jaspers and Arendt, 1966). Finally, by arguing for Parmenides' ontology over that of Plato's *Timaeus*, it is the genuine hope of this present author that we may perhaps embrace a more timeless perspective when regarding our surrounding cosmos.

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