

# X

## Being and Becoming

### (a) *Parmenidean metaphysics*

According to Aristotle, metaphysics or ‘first philosophy’ is the study of ‘being *qua* being’. The Aristotelian metaphysician, in other words, attempts to discover, to elucidate and to analyse the properties which must belong to every existent thing as such. And Aristotle’s notion of metaphysics, in a somewhat relaxed and sophisticated form, is still the modern notion. The first full-blooded metaphysician was Parmenides; and the first systematic metaphysics was the Eleatic philosophy. We have two accounts, both almost complete, of Eleatic metaphysics. The first is contained in fragment **B 8** of Parmenides, the second occupies the several fragments of Melissus; the two accounts differ in important detail, but their overall structure and their general intellectual *nisus* are one and the same; and it is, I think, helpful as well as convenient to consider them side by side.

Having argued that every object of inquiry must exist, Parmenides proceeds to consider the properties that objects of inquiry, as existent, must possess—the properties of beings *qua* being. Parmenides’ consideration is strictly deductive: ‘he agreed to nothing if it did not seem necessary, while his predecessors used to make assertions without demonstration’ (Eudemus, fr. 43W=**28 A 28**). The point has often been repeated; and it is borne out by the fragments of Parmenides’ poem. **B 8** is an intricate and concise argumentation, continuous in form and some fifty lines long. Simplicius, who preserves the fragment for us, implies that it contains the whole of Parmenides’ metaphysics (cf. **A 21**); and its self-contained form corroborates the implication.<sup>1</sup> Thus we have, in these few compact lines, a complete deductive metaphysics.

On the strength of **B 8** Parmenides has been hailed as the founder of logic. The title is not wholly apposite, for Parmenides does not theorize about logic, and he was not the first thinker to propound deductive arguments; but it happily underlines the fact that in **B 8** we have a deduction far more complex and far more self-conscious than anything the Presocratics have yet offered us. Melissus’ argument is as complicated as his master’s, and Zeno’s paradoxes are as sophisticated as anything in Parmenides; but Melissus is essentially a derivative thinker, and Zeno does not show the logical stamina of Parmenides. We meet nothing comparable to **B 8** until the middle dialogues of Plato.

Further subtlety is sometimes sought. In **B 5** the goddess announces:

It is indifferent to me  
whence I begin; for I shall come back there again (**155**).

The announcement has been attached to **B 8** and given a logical sense: the order of the ‘signposts’ along the Way of Truth is indifferent; we may begin at any one of them and proceed to deduce all the others. In other words, the various properties of existents are all mutually implicative: truth is indeed ‘well-rounded’ (**B 1. 29**). I do not think that this interpretation of **155** can be ruled out; and it is possible to invent arguments, similar to

those of **B 8**, which would support the thesis it ascribes to Parmenides. But as it stands **B 8** does not attempt to establish the mutual implication of all the ‘signposts’; and **155** is certainly capable of different interpretations. Whether Parmenides’ metaphysics contains the subtlety of circularity may be left an open question.<sup>2</sup>

A different subtlety has recently been found in **B 8**: ‘to repeat that memorable image of Wittgenstein, Parmenides’ argument is a ladder to be climbed up and thrown away. Such arguments are not, [to] put it picturesquely, horizontal deductions; if they parade as deductions they are patently self-defeating.’<sup>3</sup> Parmenides’ arguments certainly do parade as deductions: the language of **B 8** leaves no doubt about that. Whether and in what sense they are self-defeating are questions which must wait upon a detailed examination of their successive steps. Here I consider only the suggestion that the deductive parade is somehow a sham: the arguments are not really deductive and self-defeating; they are something else—not deductions at all, or at least not ‘horizontal’ deductions.

I find myself unable to understand the suggestion. The adjective ‘horizontal’ is no doubt picturesque; but the picture tells no story: I do not know what a non-horizontal deduction might be. Equally, the notion that Parmenides’ argument might not be deductive at all escapes me: how can there be an argumentative sequence that is not, or is not equivalent to, a deductive train? Parmenides’ arguments are hardly inductive or analogical. Thus I shall ignore the finer niceties of logic which have been read into **B 8**, and treat it as an ordinary deduction. Such a conventional treatment is in any case quite hard enough.

Here, first, is a translation of the whole of **B 8**. The fragment contains textual problems, to some of which I shall later advert; and its obscurities are deliberately left dark by my fairly literal rendering. For all that, some of the character of the piece may come across.

A single story of a road is left—that it is. And on it are signs very many in number—that, being, it is ungenerated and undestroyed,  
whole, of one kind and motionless, and balanced.

Nor was it ever, nor will it be; since now it is, all together, 5 one, continuous. For what generation will you inquire out for it? How, whence, did it grow? Neither from what is not will I allow you to say or think; for it is not sayable nor thinkable that it is not. And what *need* would have aroused it later or sooner, starting from nothing, to come into being? 10 In this way it is necessary either for it to be altogether or not. Nor ever from what is will the strength of trust allow it to become something apart from itself. For that reason neither to come into being

nor to perish has justice allowed it, relaxing her chains; but she holds it. And judgment about these things lies in this: 15 it is or it is not. And it has been judged, as is necessary, to leave the one [road] unthought and unnamed (for it is not a true road) and to take the other, whereby it is, actually to be real. And how might what is be then? And how might it have come into being?

For if it came into being, it is not, nor if it is about to be at some time

Thus coming into being is extinguished, and destruction is unheard of.

Nor is it divided, since it is all alike

And neither more here (which would prevent it from holding together)

nor less, but it is all full of what is.

Hence it is continuous; for what is neighbours what is. 25

And motionless in the limits of great chains

it is, beginningless, endless; since coming into being and destruction have wandered far away and true trust has driven them off. And the same, remaining in the same state, it lies in itself and thus firmly remains there. For a strong necessity 30 holds it in chains of a limit which fences it about, because it is not right for what is to be incomplete; for it is not lacking—otherwise it would want everything.

And the same thing are to think and a thought that it is.

For not without what is, on which what has been expressed depends,  
35

will you find thinking; for nothing is or will be other than what is—since *that* has Fate fettered to be whole and motionless. Hence all things are a name which mortals have laid down, trusting them to be true—to come into being and to perish, to be and not, 40 and to change place and to alter bright colour.

And since there is a furthest limit, it is complete

from all directions, like the bulk of a well-rounded ball, equally balanced from the centre in all directions. For neither any more nor any weaker can it be here or here. 45

For neither is there anything that is not, which might stop it from reaching

its like; nor is there anything that is, so that there might be of what is here more and there less—since it is all inviolable.

Hence, equal from all directions, it meets the limits alike.

Here I cease the trustworthy account and thought 50 about the truth...(156).

The logical articulation of the fragment is, I think, less clear than is sometimes claimed. And a preliminary statement of my view of its structure may not come amiss: support for this statement must wait upon detailed discussion.

The fragment begins with a prospectus, listing the ‘signs’ along the Way of Truth; in other words, summarily stating the properties of being *qua* being which 156 is to demonstrate.<sup>4</sup> The prospectus occupies lines 3–4. Line 3 gives a pair of properties, ungenerability and imperishability: they are argued for in lines 5–21. The beginning of line 4 presents a textual *crux*: I follow the modern orthodoxy, and read *oulon mounogenes te*.<sup>5</sup> *Oulon* (‘whole’) is taken up in lines 22–5. I incline to associate *mounogenes* closely with *atremes* (‘motionless’), and I suppose that ‘monogeneity’ and immobility are jointly advocated in lines 26–33. At the end of line 4 the manuscripts, with trivial exceptions, read *êd’ ateleston* (‘and incomplete’). I agree with those

scholars who find that reading incompatible with what is said in lines 32 and 42. Of the several conjectures, I have hesitatingly preferred *êd' atalanton*.<sup>6</sup> And I suppose that this last announcement in the prospectus is answered in lines 42–9. Lines 34–41 remain: I cannot associate them with anything in the prospectus; and I have sympathy with the proposal to place them after line 49, and to read them as a sort of summary of the Way of Truth. The plausibility of that suggestion may be assessed later on.

(b) *Melissus 'metaphysics'*

Melissus of Samos presents a melancholy aspect in the official portrait: his one book *Concerning Nature or What Is* (Simplicius, **30 A 4**) is no more than a cheap edition of Parmenides' poem, full of misprints and misunderstandings, to be purchased only by the intellectually impoverished. Aristotle initiated that *damnatio memoriae*: Melissus was 'a trifle crude' (*Met* 985b26=**A 7**), his reasoning 'uncouth' (*Phys* 186a9=**A 7**). Aristotle's magisterial judgment was elaborated by the author of *MXG* (**A 5**) and generally parroted by the later Peripatetics (**A 10aR**).<sup>7</sup> An amateur philosopher (and an amateur admiral), Melissus has a certain historical and personal interest; yet his fragments will hardly divert or detain us if we can listen to his master's voice.

Aristotle's judgment should be contested. Melissus was not despised by Plato (*Theaetetus*, 183E=**A 7a R**); and there is some evidence that he was for a time regarded as the authoritative spokesman of Eleatic thought.<sup>8</sup> His plain prose has an admirable lucidity, and a certain naive charm: it abandons the tortuous expression of Parmenides, but retains the conscientious intricacy of his logical argumentation. The Eleatic system is stated with strength, and also with clarity. Nor is Melissus wholly derivative: if one of his aims was the exposition and defence of the Parmenidean position, at several points he deliberately rejects his inheritance and advances views entirely his own. Perhaps he is a trifle crude; certainly he cannot be held innocent of logical blunders. (What philosopher can?) But his fragments are, to my mind, as interesting as those of Parmenides, and equally deserving of sympathetic study.

The ten surviving fragments are all preserved by Simplicius; with perhaps two exceptions they form part of a systematic deduction parallel to Parmenides' Way of Truth. The fragments themselves are sufficient to establish the general outline of Melissus' progress; and corroboration is available from the running paraphrases in the *MXG* (**A 5**), in Simplicius (*ad B 1–7*), and in Philoponus (**A 10a R**). Here, then, is a sketch of Melissus' system.

If we can think and talk about any object *O*, then it is axiomatic that  
(A) *O* exists.

Melissus lays down (A) and then asks what follows from it;<sup>9</sup> he argues first, in **B 1**, that:

(T1) *O* is ungenerated,

and then infers from (T1), in **B 1** and **B 2** that:

(T2) *O* is eternal,

or in other words (**B 2**, **B 4**) that:

(T3) *O* is temporally unlimited.

An analogous argument (**B 3**, **B 4**) yields:

(T4) *O* is spatially unlimited.

From (T4) we are next to infer (**B 5**, **B 6**) that:

(T5) *O* is unique.

It seems certain (cf. **B 7.1**) that Melissus proceeded from (T5) to:

(T6) *O* is homogeneous.

The long fragment, or pair of fragments, **B 7**, passes from (T6) to:

(T7) *O* does not alter,

and hence to:

(T8) *O* is not destroyed,

(T9) *O* does not grow,

(T10) *O* is not rearranged,

(T11) *O* does not suffer pain,

and:

(T12) *O* does not suffer anguish.

Next,<sup>10</sup> Melissus proceeds to:

(T13) *O* is not empty,

and hence to:

(T14) *O* is full.

And from (T14) he infers both:

(T15) *O* does not move,

and:

(T16) *O* is not dense or rare.

Finally **B 10** infers from (T15) to:

(T17) *O* is not divided up.

That, so far as we know, is the end of Melissus' metaphysics. Two fragments remain: **B 8** contains an interesting argument against the validity of sense-perception, which came from, or perhaps formed, a polemical appendix to Melissus' work; and **B 9** is a controversial remark about incorporeality. I shall deal separately with these two fragments (below, pp. 298, 227).

As a coda to this section I quote the first part of Gorgias on *What is Not*. The passage is not an exposition of Eleatic metaphysics and does not stand in any sense as a parallel to **B 8** of Parmenides or the fragments of Melissus; but I shall on occasion refer to it, and it is pertinent and strange enough to warrant transcription. Again, I follow Sextus' version (above, p. 173).

(66) [That nothing exists, he argues in this fashion:] If something exists, either what exists exists or what does not exist exists or both what exists and what does not exist exist. But what exists does not exist, as I will establish, nor does what does not exist, as I will show, nor do both what exists and what does not exist, as I will teach. It is not the case, therefore, that something exists.

(67) Now that which does not exist does not exist. For if what does not exist exists, at the same time it will exist and it will not exist—in so far as it is conceived of as not existing, it will not exist; in so far as, not existing, it exists,<sup>11</sup> it will again exist. But it is utterly absurd that anything should at the same time both exist and not exist. What does not

exist, therefore, does not exist. Again, if what does not exist exists, what exists will not exist; for these are contrary to one another, and if existence holds of what does not exist, non-existence will hold of what exists. But it is not the case that what exists does not exist; nor, then, will what does not exist exist.

(68) But neither does what exists exist. For if what exists exists, it is either eternal or generated or at the same time eternal and generated; but it is neither eternal nor generated, nor both, as we shall prove; what exists, therefore, does not exist. If what exists is eternal (for we must begin here), it does not have any beginning.

(69) For everything that comes into being has a beginning, but what is eternal, being ungenerated, has no beginning. But not having a beginning, it is unlimited. And if it is unlimited, it is nowhere. For if it is anywhere, that in which it is is different from it, and thus what is, being contained by something, will no longer be unlimited; for the container is greater than the contained, but nothing is greater than what is unlimited; so that what is unlimited will not be anywhere. (70) Nor is it surrounded by itself. For then that in which it is and that which is in it will be the same, and what exists will become two, place and body (for that in which it is is place and that which is in it is body). But that is absurd. Nor, then, is what exists in itself. Hence if what exists is eternal, it is unlimited and if it is unlimited, it is nowhere; and if it is existent at all.

(71) But neither can what exists be generated. For if it was generated, it was generated either from an existent or from a non-existent. But it was not generated from an existent; for if it is existent, it was not generated but already exists. Nor from a non-existent; for what does not exist cannot generate anything because, of necessity, that which generates anything must partake in subsistence. What exists, therefore, is not generated. (72) And by the same token it is not both together, eternal and generated at the same time. For these are destructive of one another, and if what exists is eternal it was not generated; and if it was generated, it is not eternal. Thus if what exists is neither eternal nor generated nor both together, what exists will not exist.

(73) Again, if it exists, it is either one or many. But it is neither one nor many, as will be established; what exists, therefore, does not exist. If it is one, it is either a quantity or continuous or a magnitude or a body. But whichever of these it is, it is not one—but if it is a quantity it will be divided; if continuous, it will be split; and similarly if it is conceived as a magnitude it will not be indivisible; and if it is a body, it will be threefold, for it will have length and breadth and depth. But it is absurd to say that what exists is none of these; what exists, therefore, is not one. (74) Nor is it many. For if it is not one, it will not be many. For the many too are taken away with it. That neither what exists nor what does not exist exists is clear from these considerations.

(75) That both together—what exists and what does not exist—do not exist is easy to argue for. If what does not exist exists and what exists

exists, what does not exist will be the same as what exists, as far as existence goes; and because of that, neither of them exists. For that what does not exist does not exist is agreed; and what exists has been proved to be the same as this; it too, then, will not exist. (76) But if what exists is the same as what does not exist, it is not possible for both to exist. For if both do, they are not the same; and if they are the same, not both do. From which it follows that nothing exists. For if neither what exists nor what does not exist nor both exist, and if nothing apart from these is conceived of, then nothing exists (157).

(c) *On generation and destruction*

Melissus' fragment **B 1** stood at or near the beginning of his book: I doubt that he offered a preliminary paragraph justifying axiom (A), that *O* exists;<sup>12</sup> rather, he assumes the success of Parmenides' attack on the two false roads of inquiry, or else he is uninterested in any alternative hypothesis to (A). **B 1** contains only the briefest argument for (T1), the theorem of ungenerability:

Whatever is<sup>13</sup> always was and always will be. For if it came into being, it is necessary that it was nothing before coming into being; now if it was nothing, in no way might anything come into being from nothing (158).

The *MXG* (975a3=A 5) pertinently asks why we should accept Melissus' brusque assertion that 'nothing comes from nothing'. Melissus has no explicit answer; but it is evident that here too he is relying on Parmenidean precedent. And indeed, in Melissus' presentation of Eleatic philosophy, (T1) has little intrinsic importance: it is only added in the course of an argument for (T2)—(T5).

In order to grasp the Eleatic attack on generation, therefore, we must undertake the arduous task of elucidating the opening argument in Parmenides' deduction. It will emerge, however, that Melissus is not wholly useless: there are two features of **B 1** which throw light on Parmenides' argument and confirm two otherwise controversial items of interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

I turn, then, to Parmenides, 156, lines 5–21. I leave lines 5–6a aside for the moment, and begin with the questions of 6b–7a: 'For what generation will you inquire out for it? How, whence, did it grow?' Some scholars distinguish between the question of generation and the question of growth;<sup>15</sup> but I find nothing in the subsequent lines that reflects such a distinction, and I take 'grow' as a picturesque synonym for 'come into being'. On the other hand, 'how' and 'whence' do not appear to be synonymous: we appear we have two questions: How could *O* have come into being? Whence did *O* come into being?

Most commentators focus their attention on the latter question; and they find that Parmenides argues his case by way of a dilemma: 'Suppose that *O* comes into being from *O'*; i.e., that *O'* generates *O*. Then either *O'* is non-existent or *O* is existent. But *O'* cannot be non-existent (lines 7b–11); nor can it be existent (lines 12–13a). Hence *O* cannot come into being at all.'

That interpretation seems to me to be mistaken on two counts. (It also requires an emendation in line 12; but I do not cite that as an objection; for, on different grounds, I accept the change of text.)<sup>16</sup>

First, I do not find a dilemmatic argument in Parmenides' poem; nor do I find one in Melissus, who summarily repeats Parmenides' argument against generation; nor yet in Empedocles, who makes self-conscious use of the same argument. Both of Parmenides' followers assert simply that *O* cannot come into being from what is not; they do not add 'or from what is'.<sup>17</sup> Second, I dislike the importation of generators into Parmenides' argument; for that importation burdens him with a patent *non sequitur*: having urged that *O* is not generated by *O'* he is made to conclude that *O* does not come into being at all. The interpretation has him use the tacit, undefended, and unevident premiss that whatever comes into being is *brought* into being by something. An interpretation which does not insinuate that premiss is preferable.

Let us take a closer look at Parmenides' phrase 'from what is not' (*ek mê eontos*). Phrases of the form 'from *X*' (*ek X*) take more than one paraphrase: I have already listed several different 'senses' of 'from' in connexion with Milesian monism. One such 'sense' (sense (v) of p. 40) has us gloss '*Y* comes into being from *X*' by: 'What was formerly *X* is now *Y*'. The stock Aristotelian example is 'the musical comes into being from the unmusical' (*Phys* 190a23), i.e. 'what was unmusical is now musical'. The hypothesis which Parmenides rejects is: 'What is comes into being from what is not'. I suggest that we interpret that hypothesis thus: 'Something that was non-existent is now existent'. Nothing speaks against that interpretation; and two texts speak for it. First, in **158** Melissus says that 'if it came into being, it is necessary that it was nothing (*mêden*) before coming into being'. That is Melissus' version of the hypothesis that 'what is came into being from what is not' (for *mêden* is synonymous with *to mê on*: above, p. 166); and he plainly understands the hypothesis as I have interpreted it. Second, Empedocles' account of Parmenides' argument presupposes the same interpretation: in **31 B 11** he berates those who 'expect that what formerly is not comes into being'; and he explains that 'it is impossible to come into being from what in no way exists' (**B 12**). Melissus and Empedocles interpret '*O* comes into being from what is not' as '*O*, which formerly did not exist, now exists'; and their interpretation is authoritative.

The generative dilemma disappears from Parmenides' text. In its place, we find the following taut argument: 'If *O* exists, then *O* cannot have come into being. For if *O* comes into being at *t*, then prior to *t* *O* did not exist. But, by the argument in **148–150** against Road (B), it is impossible for *O* not to exist.'

Is that a good argument? There are at least three objections to it. First: 'Parmenides says in lines 8b-9a that "it is not sayable nor thinkable that it is not"; and that is taken as a reference to the rejection of Road (B). But in **148–150** Parmenides only urged that if *O* does not exist, you cannot think of *O*; he did not urge that you cannot think that *O* does not exist.' The objection is not fatal; if I can think *that O* is something or other, then presumably I can think of *O*; hence if I cannot think of *O* I cannot think that *O* does not exist.

The second objection follows immediately: 'Parmenides says that it is unthinkable that *O* does not exist; he needs the premiss that it is *impossible* that *O* should not exist. How can he bridge the gap between inconceivability and impossibility?' Parmenides himself makes no attempt to bridge the gap. He is content to observe that the judgment

'*O* does not exist' cannot be true. If it makes sense, it is false; and if it makes no sense, it is of course neither true nor false. And perhaps this is all that he needs; for an opponent cannot intelligibly say that although the *judgment* that *O* does not exist cannot be true, nevertheless *O* may not exist: such a retort is simply contradictory. The opponent might reply that some facts are ineffable and unjudgeable; but again Parmenides has an answer: If there are unjudgeable facts, *O*'s non-existence cannot be among them; for if it were a fact that *O* does not exist, then the judgment that *O* does not exist would be true. If we drive a wedge between facts and judgments, then the facts must be utterly unspecifiable: the opponent wants, impossibly, a fact that is *both* specifiable *and* unjudgeable.

The third objection is more severe. The Parmenidean connexion between thought and existence, as I have presented it so far, has not carried any explicit reference to time. Yet in the context of a discussion on generation such reference must be made; and the result of making it surely yields:

(1) ( $\forall t$ ) (if at  $t$   $a$  thinks that *O* exists, then *O* exists at  $t$ ).

Now the suggestion that *O* comes into being 'from what does not exist' amounts to:

(2) *O* exists at  $t$  and at some  $t'$  prior to  $t$  *O* did not exist.

But no contradiction can be won from (1) and (2): the first conjunct of (2) guarantees the thinkability of *O*; and that seems enough to sustain the thought that *O* did not exist. The time of the thought and the time of *O*'s putative non-existence are different: Parmenides has at most shown the absurdity of '*O* does not exist'; he has not yet shown any absurdity in '*O* did not exist'. And (2) requires only the latter judgment.

Now Parmenides might counter that argument by appealing to a general and plausible thesis about the relation between truth and time, viz:

(3) ( $\forall t$ ) ( $\forall t'$ ) (if at  $t$   $a$  truly says that [ $P$  at  $t'$ ], then if at  $t'$   $a$  says that [ $P$  at  $t'$ ] he speaks truly).

What is now truly said to have happened yesterday could yesterday have been truly said to be happening then. Hence if at  $t$  I can truly say that *O* did not exist at  $t'$ , at  $t'$  I might truly have said '*O* does not now exist'. But, by (1), I cannot truly say at  $t'$  '*O* does not now exist'; hence at  $t$  I cannot truly say '*O* did not exist at  $t'$ '.

Of course, anyone who accepts both (1) and (3) will be obliged to infer that no true propositions at all can be made about beings whose existence has temporal limits. That conclusion may seem absurd, yet it is not a conclusion to make an Eleatic shudder; and I am inclined to think that Parmenides' argument in lines 6–9 has considerable force. If I reject it, that is because I have already rejected (1). I suspect, indeed, that some who are sceptical of (1) will still feel some force in Parmenides' first argument against generation; I shall return briefly to this point at the end of my discussion of lines 5–21.

The next argument occupies lines 9b–10: it takes up the question of *how O* might come into being 'starting from nothing'. (*Tou mêdenos* again means *tou mê eontos*.) '...what need would have aroused it later or sooner...?' The phrase *husteron ê prosthen* is sometimes translated 'later rather than sooner', or 'at one time rather than at another'. Thus Parmenides is applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and his argument runs as follows:

(4) If *O* does not exist during a period  $T$ , then for any two points  $t, t'$  in  $T$ , *O* has a property  $P$  at  $t$  if and only if it has  $P$  at  $t'$ .

(5) If *O* comes into existence at *t*, then for some *P*, *O* comes into existence at *t* because *O* has *P* at *t*.

Suppose, then:

(6) *O* comes into existence at *t*<sub>1</sub>.

Then:

(7) *O* comes into existence at *t*<sub>1</sub> because *O* has *P* at *t*<sub>1</sub>.

Hence:

(8) *O* has *P* at *t*<sub>1</sub>,

and so, by (4):

(9) *O* has *P* at *t*<sub>2</sub>.

But from (9) and (7) we can infer:

(10) *O* comes into existence at *t*<sub>2</sub>.

And that is incompatible with (6).

The Principle of Sufficient Reason operates at step (5) and at step (10): (5) is an application of the requirement that all happenings have *some* explanation; and the inference from (9) and (7) to (10) assumes that the explanation must be *sufficient* for what it explains. Compare Anaximander's argument about the stability of the earth (above, pp. 23–6).

There is a fairly obvious weakness here: (4) is, at best, true only if *P* is restricted to non-relational properties of *O*; yet it is precisely in terms of its relational properties that we would hope to explain the generation of *O*: *O* may not change intrinsically during *T*; but at *t*<sub>1</sub> something may hold of it which does not hold of it at *t*<sub>2</sub>—the demiurge may have determined upon *t*<sub>1</sub> as the appropriate time to create *O*.

That may encourage us to seek a simpler argument in the text; and scholars have doubted the propriety of ascribing (4)–(10) to Parmenides, both on linguistic and on historical grounds.<sup>18</sup> If we revert to the earlier translation, 'later *or* sooner', and gloss that by 'at any particular time', we need only ascribe to Parmenides the blunt assertion that if *O* does not exist prior to *t*, then there is no reason why *O* should come into existence at *t*, or at any other time. Unfortunately, that simple argument is open to a simple version of the objection to the sophisticated argument: why ever should we suppose that an intelligent agent might not pick upon *t* as the time for exercising his creative powers on *O*?

The objection raises interesting issues; but I think that Parmenides would be unmoved by it. For his line of thought is, I suspect, simpler than is usually supposed: if *O* does not exist at *t*, then nothing can 'rouse' it into existence, for it is not there to be 'roused'. And if we soften 'rousing' into creating we are no better off: *a* cannot create *O* at *t* unless he can think of *O* at *t*. And since, *ex hypothesi*, *O* does not exist at *t*, then by (1) *a* cannot think of *O*. Thus construed, Parmenides' second argument has as much force as his first.

The two arguments are summarized in line 11; but the line is puzzling. '*Pampan*' ('altogether') must bear a temporal sense; and '*houtôs*' ('in this way') should mean something like 'as far as the considerations so far broached take us'. Thus I gloss the line as follows: 'As far as generation goes, *O* either exists at all times or not at any'.<sup>19</sup> The case against generation is now concluded: unless we can make out a case for the destructibility of what exists, we must allow its sempiternity.

We therefore expect an argument against destruction; and line 14 implies that the expectation has been satisfied. But lines 12–13 are desperately difficult: they contain a textual *crux*, and two ambiguities.

I have translated an emended version of line 12: the manuscripts read ‘*ek me eontos*’: ‘Nor from what is not will the strength of trust allow *gignesthai ti par’ auto*’. In the last phrase, ‘*ti*’ may be either subject or complement of ‘*gignesthai*’, and ‘*auto*’ may refer either to ‘what is’ or to ‘what is not’. Thus the manuscript text yields four readings: (i) ‘From what is not, it is not possible for anything to come into being apart from what is’; (ii) ‘From what is not, it is not possible for anything to come into being apart from what is not’; (iii) ‘From what is not, it is not possible for it to become anything apart from what is’; (iv) ‘From what is not, it is not possible for it to become anything apart from what is not’.

None of (i)–(iv) is satisfactory: (iii) and (iv) make no decent sense at all; (i) is impotent as an argument against generation and cannot constitute an argument against destruction. If we construe ‘from’ in the generator sense, then we can conjure an argument out of (ii): ‘If *O*’ does not exist and *O*’ generates *O*, then *O* does not exist; hence if *O* exists and is generated from *O*’, it is not the case that *O*’ does not exist.’ But I doubt if that argument is Parmenidean: first, the very notion of the generation of non-entities is remote from Parmenides’ thought; second, (ii) interprets ‘from’ in the fashion which raises problems for the rest of lines 5–21; and third, (ii) has no bearing upon destruction.

Several scholars, for different reasons, have emended ‘*ek me eontos*’ in line 12 to ‘*ek tou eontos*’ or some equivalent phrase.<sup>20</sup> With that text ‘*auto*’ can only pick up ‘what is’; and there are thus just two readings: (v) ‘From what is, it is not possible for anything to come into being apart from what is’; (vi) ‘From what is, it is not possible for it to become anything apart from what is’.

Reading (v) yields the gloss: ‘If *O* exists, and *O* generates *O*’, then  $O=O$ ’. There is an argument against generation here if we add the plausible premiss that a thing cannot generate itself: ‘If *O* exists and generates something, it generates itself; but nothing generates itself; hence nothing can be generated from what exists’. But I find it hard to impute that argument to Parmenides: the thesis that existent generators could only generate themselves is bizarre, and can hardly stand unsupported in the text; nor does that reading yield an argument against destruction.

I therefore turn to reading (vi); and my translation is designed to fit that reading. Given (vi), the word ‘from’ has the same sense as I have given it earlier; and Parmenides offers us an implicit argument against destruction. I paraphrase: ‘Nor from a state of existence can *O* become something other than what is’; i.e., *O* cannot change from existing to not existing, *O* cannot be destroyed. That offers a statement, not an argument. Yet it is obvious what argument we are to supply: if *O* is destroyed at *t*, then *O* exists before *t* and *O* does not exist after *t*. But ‘it is not sayable nor thinkable that it is not.’ The objections and replies that I rehearsed in connexion with lines 6–9 will bear equally on lines 12–13; I shall not march them out again. It is worth saying, however, that those philosophers who sympathize with lines 6–9 are unlikely to extend their sympathy to 12–13: Parmenides sees an exact symmetry between generation and destruction, past and future: the neo-Parmenideans feel an important asymmetry here. That feeling will be discussed later.

We can now conclude that either *O* exists ‘altogether’—is sempiternal, or else it exists not at all. And lines 13b–18, relaxing the tight stays of Parmenides’ argument, remind us that the second alternative is already ruled out; for we are travelling along the Way of Truth.

(d) *Being and time*

By now, then, ‘coming into being is extinguished and destruction is unheard of’; but before he states that conclusion Parmenides interposes two more lines of argument. Line 19 offers two theses, in the form of rhetorical questions; and line 20 offers two supporting reasons. Theses and reasons are arranged chiasmatically.<sup>21</sup>

The second reason is unambiguously expressed: ‘it is not,...if it is about to be at some time’; i.e.:

(1) If *O* is going to exist in the future, *O* does not exist.

The first thesis is crabbed: ‘how might what is be then?’ We can extract an intelligible thought if we read ‘then’ (*epeita*) as ‘in the future’; thus:

(2) If *O* exists, *O* will not exist in the future.

For (2) actually follows from (1); hence (1) may reasonably be advanced in support of (2). And Parmenides plainly means us to infer that *O* will not exist in the future.

The first reason reads: ‘if it came into being, it is not’; i.e.:

(3) If *O* came into existence, *O* does not exist.

And the second thesis, correspondingly, should run:

(4) If *O* exists, *O* did not come into existence.

That, at least, is the natural construe; but it suffers from a severe disability; for the deliberately symmetrical form of Parmenides’ verse turns out to mask an asymmetrical content: (1) talks about future being, (3) about past *becoming*. There are two ways of restoring symmetry. Some interpret ‘*genoito*’ and ‘*egento*’ in lines 19–20 as though they were past tenses of ‘*einai*’: ‘And how could it *have existed*? For if it *existed*, it is not’. Then (3) denies past existence to what is, just as (1) denies future existence to it. Alternatively, ‘*epeita peloi*’ and ‘*mellei*’ may be twisted to refer to future becoming: ‘How might what is *come to be* in the future?...nor if it is going *to come to be*’. Then (1) denies future becoming to what is, just as (3) denies past becoming to it.

Neither of those suggestions fits the Greek easily; and neither fits the context peculiarly well: on the first reading we have a pair of thoughts which are inappropriate harbingers of the conclusion at line 21. On the second reading, we have a further otiose attack on generation. Moreover, on neither interpretation does Parmenides have a pellucid argument. On the second reading, the case against future generation is sound: if *O* is to come into existence at *t*, *O* does not now exist. But the case against past generation cannot be stated in a parallel fashion: from ‘*O* came into existence at *t*’ it does not follow that *O* does not exist now; in order to extract that conclusion we must pad the argument with Parmenidean premisses drawn from earlier parts of the attack on generation: ‘if *O* came into existence at *t*, then before *t* *O* did not exist; and if *O* ever failed to exist, *O* always fails to exist’.

On the first reading, we cannot find a sound argument either for (1) or for (3). The first reading does, however, suggest a plausible explanation of why Parmenides should

have thought (1) and (3) true. There is a distinction between what a man implies in stating something, and what his statement implies. Very roughly, in saying that *P* I imply that *Q* if it would be odd or unconventional or misleading for me, in those circumstances, to say that *P*, if I also believed that not-*Q*. *P* implies *Q* if it is impossible for *P* to be true and *Q* false. If you ask me how many hours a day I work, and I say 'At least four', I imply that I do not regularly work for ten hours a day; but my statement does not imply that. Similarly, if I say '*a* is going to be *F*' or '*a* was *F*'; then I imply that (at least as far as I know) *a* is not yet, or no longer, *F*; but what I say does not have those implications. Now it is easy to confuse the implications of what I say with the implications of my saying it; and I suggest that Parmenides may have fallen into just such a confusion here: observing, correctly, that anyone who says '*O* was' or '*O* will be' implies that *O* is not now, he mistakenly inferred that '*O* was' and '*O* will be' both imply '*O* is not', and hence concluded that *O* was not and *O* will not be.

On the whole, then, I incline to the interpretation of lines 19–20 which has them deny past and future existence to what now exists. Evidently, that interpretation raises severe difficulties of a logical and of a structural nature: how can Parmenides argue against the generation of what exists and yet hold that what exists did not exist in the past? Why does he interpolate lines 19–20 before his conclusion, in line 21, about generation and destruction? Before facing up to those difficulties, I shall attempt to elucidate lines 5–6a of **156**:

Nor was it ever, nor will it be; since now it is, all together, one,  
continuous.

Textually the lines are far from certain; but, for once, the variant readings offer no serious variation in sense. I begin with three preliminary points. First, we should not take 5–6a as part of Parmenides' prospectus; for the lines overtly contain an argument. Second, we may not divorce 5–6a from 6b–21; for an explanatory particle unites them. Third, the three phrases *homou pan*, *hen* and *suneches* ('all together, one, continuous') are synonymous, or at least mutually explicatory. To say that *O* is 'one' is to say that it is a unity, and a prime way of being unitary is being continuous (cf. Aristotle, *Met* 1015b36–1016a3). Continuity here is temporal: *O* is continuous if there are no temporal gaps in its career. And to say that *O* is 'all together' is only to say that it is 'altogether' (line 11): there are no temporal periods which do not contain it.<sup>22</sup> Thus the conclusion expressed in line 5a is derived from a premiss asserting that *O* is temporally continuous; and that premiss, it seems, is in turn to be derived from the argument in lines 6b–21 that I have already analysed.

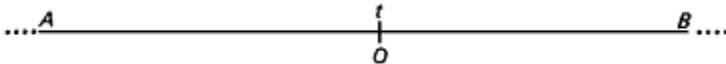
What conclusion does line 5a state? At least four interpretations are on the market, (a) Some say that line 5a merely denies generation and destruction, in a rhetorically elevated style; and that view has tidiness in its favour, for it leaves lines 5–21 with a single subject. Tidiness, however, is outweighed by two considerations: line 5a purports to offer a deduction from the ungenerability of what is, and not merely to assert its ungenerability; and only the wildest rhetorical fancy will read line 5 as expressing the same sentiment as lines 3 and 21.<sup>23</sup> (b) Others say that line 5a states the omnitemporality of what exists; and that view comports well with lines 6b–21; for if *O* is ungenerable and indestructible, it exists for ever. But I am unable to see how an

assertion that *O* did not and will not exist can amount to an expression of the omnitemporality of *O*. (c) Third, it is said that line 5a sets *O* outside the boundaries of time: *O* is a timeless entity in the sense that no temporally tagged predications hold good of it. That interpretation sees Parmenides through Platonic eyes, and reads into line 5a an adumbration of the doctrine advanced in the *Timaeus* (37D–38A). There are attractions in the view; but again there is strong textual evidence against it: line 5 expressly says that *O* ‘now is’ (*nun estin*), and that is flatly incompatible with the thesis of atemporality. (d) Finally, it has been supposed that *O* exists in time and endures through time, but that all times are eternally present in a changeless now. Such a notion has had theological and poetical adherents; thus God, according to Plutarch, ‘exists in no time, but in the changeless and timeless *aiôn*...being one, he has filled eternity in a single now’ (*de E apud Delphos* 393AB). But that notion is hopelessly confused: there is no sense in the suggestion that time past and time future are all one in time present, that all moments are eternally present; for the idea of a plurality of times implies a past or a future distinct from the present. I am loth to ascribe such a vile thought to Parmenides.

What, then, does line 5a say? The message seems to be simple enough: ‘*O* exists now’ is true; ‘*O* exists at *t*’ is false whenever *t* is distinct from now, either past or future. Is that message coherently supported by lines 5b–6a? Is it coherent in itself? Does it cohere with the views expounded in lines 6b–21?

It is tempting to find a sophisticated and powerful argument in 5b–6a.<sup>24</sup> Parmenides may be thought to rely tacitly upon Leibniz’ principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, applied to temporal instants: ‘Two instants in *O*’s career are distinct only if they are “discernible”: only if something is true of *O* at one instant and not true of it at another. But *O* never changes in any respect—it is “all together” ‘or alike in all respects—and so nothing could be true of it at any instant in its career which was not true of it at every instant. Hence there are no distinct instants in *O*’s career; and we cannot sensibly say of it that it was or that it will be.’ That construction is attractive but misconceived. Parmenides does indeed argue that *O* cannot change in any respect at all; but his argument is not presented until lines 26–33. Thus the conclusion stated in line 5a is supposed to depend on an argument which is not advanced for another twenty lines. The gap is considerable, and nothing in the text of lines 26–33 invites us to think back to line 5a.

Let us take another look at the sweep of argument in lines 6–21. Consider the diagram:



Here *t* is the present moment on the time-line *AB*. We know that *O* exists at *t*. Now the arguments of 6b–18, ruling out generation and destruction, show that *O* exists ‘altogether’; in other words, that there is no point on *AB* at which *O* does not exist. And the argument in 19–20 shows that *O* does not exist at any point on *AB* except at point *t*. Those conclusions are not inconsistent: together they entail that every point on *AB* is identical with *t*. Not only is there no time like the present—there is no time but the present. *O*’s existence is not a beautiful atoll in the empty sea of eternity: there are no

points in time not embellished by *O*, because time itself embraces no more than a point. Thus *O* is ‘all together, one, continuous’: it occupies every point of time at once; for time has only one point. The present moment’s all its lot.

Is that view coherent? It is often believed that ‘there is no time without change’. Take any two instants  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . If the state of the universe at  $t_1$  is the same as its state at  $t_2$ , and if there is no instant  $t_3$  between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  such that the state of the universe at  $t_3$  is different from its state at  $t_1$ , then  $t_1=t_2$ . The Parmenidean universe is entirely changeless; consequently, if time implies change, that universe is punctual. *O*, and anything else there may be, exists only at  $t$ . I do not wish to defend that view of time here. I mention it only to indicate that the thesis I ascribe to Parmenides is not simply absurd; a later context will give an opportunity to return to the question.

Is that view of 5–6a consistent with the rest of Parmenides’ philosophy? The punctual existence of *O* is not announced in the prospectus; it is not stated in line 21; it is not used to infer any of the other properties of *O*: it is, superficially at least, contradicted by lines 29–30, which appear to speak of a stable and enduring entity. Such facts will lead different readers to different conclusions. I incline to infer that Parmenides did not have a firm grasp of the inordinately slippery fish he held in his hand. Others may say that Parmenides simply contradicts himself; or that he changed his mind (perhaps incorporating lines 5–6 into a second edition of his poem); or that he never contradicted his punctual thesis but merely did not care to use it. Still others will infer that my interpretation of lines 5–21 is mistaken. Anyone who has given more than three minutes thought to those lines will recognize them as terrain in which true trust is impossible: the conclusion I offer here is not a thing I advocate; it is rather the view I am least often inclined to reject.

### (e) *Eternity*

The first fragment of Melissus introduced my discussion of Parmenides’ thoughts on generation. It is time to return to Melissus and to consider the second thesis of his philosophy: that *O* is eternal. With (T2)–(T4) Melissus leaves the safety of Parmenides’ shadow, and strides forward on his own; at precisely this point, according to Aristotle, he walks into the quicksands of fallacy. First, here is the text of **B 2**:

Again, [i] since it did not come into being but it is, it always was and always will be, and it has no beginning and no end but is unlimited.<sup>25</sup> For [ii] if it had come into being, it would have had a beginning (for [iii] it would have begun coming into being at some time) and [ii<sup>a</sup>] an end (for [iii<sup>a</sup>] it would have ended coming into being at some time). But [iv] since it did not begin or end, it always was and always will be and it has no beginning or end; for [v] it is not accomplishable that what is not altogether is always (**159**).

As its first sentence shows, **159** intends to prove (T2) and (T3) on the basis of (T1): ungenerability grounds eternity and temporal infinity. (Propositions (T2) and (T3) are, I

take it, equivalent; at all events, Melissus makes no attempt to distinguish between them.)

In presenting the argument of **159** I shall abbreviate 'O always was and always will be, and has no beginning and no end but is unlimited' to 'O is  $\phi$ '. Thus, as sentence [i] shows, **159** is to prove:

(1) O is  $\phi$ ,

and to prove it by *modus ponens* from:

(2) If O is ungenerated, then O is  $\phi$ .

Thus the burden of **159** is the establishment of (2).

(2) is derived from two propositions:

(3) If O is generated, then O has a beginning and O has an end.

(4) If O did not begin and did not end, then O is  $\phi$ ,

Proposition (3) is expressed in [ii] and [ii<sup>a</sup>]; and it is supported in [iii] and [iii<sup>a</sup>], which state:

(5) If O is generated, then O at some time began to be generated and O at some time ceased being generated.

Proposition (4) is expressed in [iv] and supported in [v] by:

(6) It is not possible that O is not altogether and O is always.

Each step in Melissus' argument is questionable. First, let us look at the inference from (6) to (4). The chief problem here is the obscurity of (6). Perhaps we should explain Melissus' phrase 'it is altogether (*pan*)' by Parmenides' phrase 'it is altogether (*pampan*)' (**156**. 11): *pampan* required a temporal explanation in Parmenides, and a temporal explanation of Melissus' *pan* will at least fit (6) into the context of **159**; moreover, it will make (6) a tautological truth.<sup>26</sup> Now it is possible to construe (4) as a tautology; and that construe is, I think, the one Melissus requires. Consequently, (4) follows trivially from (6).

Second, there is the inference from (5) to (3). The text in sentences [iii] and [iii<sup>a</sup>] is uncertain: the canonical reading is not '*ginomenon*' (which I translate) but '*genomenon*'. That reading requires the following translation: '[ii]...had a beginning (for [iii], having come into being, it would have begun at some time) and [ii<sup>a</sup>] an end (for [iii<sup>a</sup>], having come into being, it would have ended at some time)'. But on that translation [iii] and [iii<sup>a</sup>] merely restate [ii] and [ii<sup>a</sup>]; they add nothing. The reading '*ginomenon*' is in any case better attested; and it gives an argument to Melissus. Unfortunately, the argument is feeble. Proposition (5) is indeed true: if O underwent a process of generation, then that process had a beginning and also had an ending. But (5) will yield (3) only by means of:

(7) If O began or ceased being generated, then O began or ceased. Now the consequent of (7) must be read as 'O began or ceased *to exist*'; and it is plain that (7) is false. We may imagine that Melissus gave his tacit assent to (7); for it involves just that move of 'dequalification' which we saw reason to ascribe to Heraclitus and which, on Aristotle's testimony, was a frequent and pervasive fallacy (above, p. 73). Certainly, Melissus' argument for (3) is fallacious; and it is hard to dream up any more plausible defence of (3).

What, finally, of the inference from (3) and (4) to (2)? Schematically, Melissus moves from propositions of the form:

(A) If P then Q,

and:

(B) If not- $Q$ , then  $R$ ,

to one of the form:

(C) If not- $P$ , then  $R$ .

And that argument pattern is invalid. I suppose that Melissus took ‘If  $P$  then not- $Q$ ’ and ‘If not- $P$  then  $Q$ ’ to be equivalent: it is easy to see how that equivalence will license the move from (A) and (B) to (C). (In finding that false equivalence behind the argument of 159, I am, I think, agreeing with Aristotle, who accused Melissus of using illicit conversions on conditional propositions.<sup>27</sup>) Those who are schooled in formal logic, and acquainted with the complexities of the conditional, may despise Melissus for committing so gross a blunder. But the logic of conditionals is remarkably difficult to apprehend; in particular, it is easy to reason that if  $P$  implies not- $Q$ , then not- $P$  cannot also imply not- $Q$  and so must imply  $Q$ . Plato and Aristotle were aware of the pitfalls surrounding conditional propositions; but they did not escape them all. Centuries later, Aulus Gellius delighted to find the Melissan fallacy committed by Pliny, ‘the most learned man of his age’ (IX.xvi). And if the modern logician is censorious of Melissus, let him reflect upon his own tiro entanglement with the logic of *if* and *then*.

Melissus’ (T2) is not a Parmenidean thesis, if my interpretation of Parmenides as a punctualist is correct. Eleatic entities are ungenerable and incorruptible—that much is shared by Parmenides and Melissus. But while Parmenides’ beings have no temporal duration, Melissan beings are sempiternal. The difference of view seems immense; but it reduces to a disagreement over the relation between time and change. Melissus’ entities, like Parmenides’, are immutable. Melissus, however, thought (tacitly, no doubt) that an immutable world might sensibly be said to endure; Parmenides implicitly denied that. Both philosophers agree that for any instant  $t$ ,  $O$  exists at  $t$ . Parmenides believes and Melissus does not believe that all instants are identical.

#### (f) *The logic of becoming*

The theory that all genuine entities are sempiternal has had a remarkable popularity in the history of philosophy: it is a Platonic doctrine; it appears in Aristotle in the view that form and matter cannot be created or destroyed; the seventeenth-century rationalists held that substances are sempiternal; today we vaguely talk of the Conservation of Matter, and imply a belief that the basic stuff of the world has an Eleatic stability. I shall have a little to say about that theory in a later chapter; I end this chapter with a few notes on generation.

Most philosophers would agree that neither Parmenides nor Melissus proved the impossibility of generation; but many, I guess, will think that a finger plunged into the Eleatic pie will pull out a sweet philosophical plum.

Consider the logic of generation. ‘If  $O$  comes into being at time  $t$ , then before  $t$   $O$  does not exist, and after  $t$   $O$  exists’. Generation, it seems, is a species of change or alteration. To put it roughly,  $O$  alters at  $t$  if and only if for some property  $P$ , before  $t$   $O$  lacks  $P$  and after  $t$   $O$  has  $P$ . Let  $P$  be existence; then the formula I have just used to express generation is only trivially different from one expressing a type of alteration. Aristotle is aware of this, or something like it: in *Physics A* 7–9 he first offers an

analysis of 'absolute becoming' or generation which makes it a special case of alteration; and then he states that only in that way are Eleatic doubts about generation surmountable.

Aquinas, reporting the Aristotelian position, puts it succinctly: *Omne fieriest mutari*, all becoming is changing (*Summa Theologiae* Ia, q.45, 2). Aquinas did not like it: it follows, he says, that 'creation is a changing; but every changing depends on a subject [i.e., is the alteration of some pre-existing subject matter].... Therefore it is impossible for anything to come into being from nothing by God's action. 'Now the first chapter of *Genesis* proves that argument to be unsound; for God created the world *ex nihilo*. The Aristotelians, attending only to the present world, observed no sublunary creation and felt no misgivings about the thesis that becoming is changing.

Aquinas agreed with their sublunary observations, but he accused them of ignoring the cosmic and original act of creation. But Aquinas does not think that Aristotle is simply in error; he has a subtler thing to say: 'Creation is not a changing, except only in respect of our way of understanding. In creation, by which the whole substance of things is produced, you cannot find some one thing which is differently qualified now and before—except only in respect of our understanding, since some object is understood first not to have existed at all, and afterwards to exist' (*ibid.*, *ad 2*). We cannot understand generation unless we think in terms of an object's changing from non-existent to existent; but our thought fails, in an important way, to correspond to the facts.

There is surely truth in this: creating a table is not like painting a table red. When it is painted, my pre-existent and complete table loses one property and acquires another: what was green is now red. When it is made or constructed, the table does not undergo any comparable process; for there is no table there to undergo any process: there is no table off-stage, leaving the green room of non-being to wait in the wings of becoming for its cue to pirouette onto the boards of reality. The metaphysics of creation and generation is not like that: becoming is not altering. And a precisely analogous argument goes for destruction: when I die, I do not alter—I cease to be: I do not lose one and assume another property—there ceases to be any property-bearer at all.

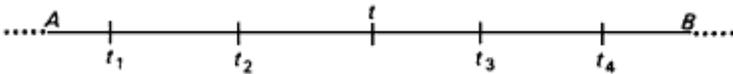
That argument is impressionistic. To delineate it more precisely would require a digression both long and unwarranted; for even though the argument raises interesting problems about generation, they are not, I think, Eleatic problems. According to Elea (if I may state things crudely) the formula '*O* did not exist and now *O* exists' is untrue—and that is why generation is impossible. According to Aquinas, the formula is potentially misleading; but for all that it may be true. And indeed, it is surely consistent, and plausible, to maintain on the one hand that Socrates' birth is not a process undergone by Socrates in the way in which his growing pale is; and on the other hand that part of what we mean when we say that Socrates was born in 470 BC is that before 470 Socrates did not exist, whereas after 470 he did exist.

Thus I leave Aquinas and turn to two modern dogmas with an Eleatic flavour. The first dogma is contained in the slogan 'Existence is not a Predicate'. If '*O* comes into being' entails '*O* did not exist and now *O* exists', then generation is indeed impossible. For in '*O* did not exist and now *O* exists', 'exist' is used as a predicate of *O*: since existence is not a predicate, that formula is ill-formed; hence '*O* comes into being' cannot say anything true. The argument has an Eleatic conclusion; but it out-Herods

Herod: it eliminates ‘*O* does not exist’, but it also eliminates the Eleatic axiom ‘*O* exists’. The Eleatics are going to get no help from the dogma that existence is not a predicate; and I therefore leave the dogma, observing only that it commits its holders to an Eleatic denial of generation—and that it is perfectly false.

The second dogma relates to issues I have discussed in the previous chapter. It connects thought with existence, holding that if I am to judge that *O* has *P*, then I must be able to refer to *O*, but that I cannot, at any instant *t*, refer to *O* unless *O* exists at *t* or existed prior to *t*. It follows that no sentence of the form ‘*O* will come into being’ can express a true judgment. For if I judge that *O* will come into being, *O* must already exist or have existed; and so my judgment is false.

That view is Eleatic, but not full-bloodedly so; for it countenances an asymmetry between past and future. Assume the dogma true and consider this diagram.



Take the following judgments, all made at *t*: (i) ‘*O* came into being; (ii) ‘*O* will come into being’; (iii) ‘*O* was destroyed’; (iv) ‘*O* will be destroyed.’ Suppose, first, that *O* in fact lasts from *t*<sub>1</sub> to *t*<sub>2</sub>: then (i) and (iii) are true; (ii) and (iv) are false. Next, suppose that *O* in fact lasts from *t*<sub>2</sub> to *t*<sub>3</sub>: then (i) and (iv) are true; (ii) and (iii) are false. Suppose, finally, that *O* in fact lasts from *t*<sub>3</sub> to *t*<sub>4</sub>: then (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) are all false. Thus (ii) alone is inevitably false; each of (i), (iii) and (iv)—which the Eleatics renounce along with (ii)—can be true.

The second dogma is thus Eleatic, but only to a low degree. In any event, the dogma seems to me to be false: I can, I think, judge that *O* has *P* even if *O* does not yet exist; I can judge that the Smiths’ second child will be male, or that the Cup Final will be won by Arsenal. It is a difficult question to determine precisely under what conditions I can judge that *O* has *P*; and a question I shall not presume to broach here. But I end the chapter by saying, confidently, that neither the existence nor the pre-existence of *O* is a necessary condition for making judgments about *O*.