Preface:

Despite some good insights and clear explanations, our textbook misses or is wrong about a few important things, especially regarding the early Greek philosophers.

- Its understanding that “logos” always had to do with rationality.
- The idea that Heraclitus was simply saying that everything changes, and implied nothing deeper.
- And especially that Parmenides is philosophically less important than Plato and Aristotle. Palmer devotes a mere 5 pages to Parmenides and his disciple Zeno, but almost forty pages to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (this is typical of most histories of philosophy). The latter 3 had a far greater influence on the history of thought than did Parmenides, but Parmenides’ philosophy is solid truth based on the direct experience of Being in the silence, and on strict logic, and theirs is mere speculation and illogical. That’s a teaching in itself. As the movie said, “You can’t handle the truth!”

In this section I will try to correct the errors about Parmenides, and, to clarify his understanding of Being, I will compare his teaching with the teaching of the great Buddhist philosopher, Nagarjuna, and the Advaita Vedanta teachings of the Ashtavakra Gita and the story of Uddalaka and Svetaketu from the Chandogya Upanishad, the Buddhist Heart Sutra, and Psalm 82 in the Bible.

Recap:

1. Earliest philosophers were searching for oneness.
2. Anaximander discovered emptiness—but underlying the material world.
3. Heraclitus total emptiness.
4. About the same time, the Chinese were discovering that emptiness was the essence of all things.
5. Conclusion of this line of philosophy: “Stuff” is unreal, emptiness (formlessness) is real.

Parmenides:

- He was a priest of Apollo, and regarded logical ontology as a matter of spiritual life and death.
  - Jesus: “Let the dead bury the dead.” (Mt 8:22)
  - His goal was to set people free in this lifetime.
- The 3 elements of authentic ontology according to Parmenides:
  1. **LONGING** Prodigal Son: only those who desperately want to go home can know Being/God.
  2. **STILLNESS** Incubation and meditation; he created a shrine to his teacher, Ameinias, for teaching him stillness.
  3. **LOGIC** Parmenides invented logic and logical inference; saw it as a spiritual discipline, for the sake of “saving souls”—but not otherworldly—be free here and now. Zeno and Jesus perfect examples of this. Almost everyone misses this: that his
giving the world logic wasn’t just some abstract philosophical effort, but was seen by him as part of his pastoral duty. Try to see logic in this light.

- **The great teaching of Parmenides:** “It is necessary to say and think that Being is and not-being is not.”
  - This statement is necessary, like an axiom in Euclidean geometry.
    - E.g., all triangles on a plane surface contain 180° of angularity.
    - The opposite of necessary is contingent (“it depends”). E.g., a triangle contains 180° of angularity is contingent on the surface of the triangle being a plane.
    - But note that Parmenides’ proposition is contingent on nothing.
    - Many philosophers and scientists, following Plato, believed that “Euclidean” thinking proved that we could have certainty about things in this world. It would not be until the 19th century and the invention of non-Euclidean geometries that philosophers would see that certainty in science is impossible (and quantum physics absolutely ended the belief in certainty in science).
    - I’m being deliberately anachronistic. Euclid of Alexandria lived around 300 BCE.

- From a necessary (or atomic or axiomatic) statement we can logically infer other necessary truths. A few examples:
  - Being cannot arise from not-being: since not-being is not, there is nothing for Being to arise from.
    - Later this would be called the principle of *Ex nihilo, nihil fit*.
  - Being must be infinite: if Being was not infinite it would have to be bounded by something other than Being. But there is nothing other than Being.
  - Being must be indivisible: if Being could be divided into separate parts, then only one part could be called “Being,” and the others would have to be something else; but there is no something else, only Being “is.”
    - Thus separation, individuality, and separate things are an illusion.
    - Thus, as I often say in class, “Only God is real.” That’s the meaning of the Burning Bush story in the Bible (Exodus 3:14): only God can say “I am”—and, since humans are forever saying “I am” and “it is” . . .
  - Motion is impossible: if motion was possible then when Being is here, it is not there, but will be there, and not here, sometime in the future; but this implies that Being can change to/from not-being, which is inconceivable.
    - As the textbook (pages 36-37) says: “Motion is impossible because motion would involve Being going from where Being is to where Being isn’t (but there can’t be any such place as the place where Being isn’t).”
    - Parmenides’ disciple Zeno of Elia showed with simple math that motion is impossible.
• Similarly, change is impossible: if change was possible, then Being could come to be something other than Being, which is not-being.
  • Note: about 2300 years later Immanuel Kant will say that time and space are artificial forms humans make up so that they can understand the world of ever-changing separate objects.
  • I.e., space and time are illusions that make a universe of always-moving separate objects seem real.
  • Heraclitus seems to disagree with Parmenides, for he said that only change is real. But if you “unpack” what he says, he is agreeing with Parmenides (only Parmenides was clearer). If change is incessant, then there can be no “things” (as we have discussed in class); and therefore there can be no things to change and move—therefore change and things, both, are illusions.
  • Being is complete: if Being was not complete, then there would have to be something else besides Being.
  • Remember the problem of desire (Tao Te Ching 1): if you think there is something important lacking from your life, then you don’t realize that you are. Whatever is is all there is. You are living without realization, you are living unrealistically—illogically and crazy—and thus can never be fulfilled. This is a tremendous practical problem for all of us.

• The problem of human life:
  • The goddess who teaches Parmenides teaches that humans believe in an impossible world that is a mixture of being and not-being.
    • A world of greater and less Being, of levels and degrees of Being.
    • E.g., cockroaches have less Being than God or humans; beautiful and rich people have more Being (and thus are more important) than ordinary people; and on and on and on and . . . .
  • Prodigal Son story: as long as you believe this you will never be home or free.
  • When you realize the simple logic that only Being is, then, as the Jewish philosopher, Jesus, said, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32)

• The Two Ways.
  1. Aletheia (truth, certainty). The way of salvation or freedom in this world.
  2. Doxa (opinion, contingent truth, scientific truth). The way of science. Science can never be certain, but science is important to humans and we must strive to come as close to certainty as we can.

• The way of certainty: the only thing we can ever know for certain is that Being is and not-being is not, and the corollaries of that proposition.
  • But this realization/certainty—and only this one—will transform our lives, as it did the lives of Zeno and Jesus, for examples.
Note the Greek word “aletheia”: it comes from a, not, and lethe, forgetting; i.e., remembering. Certainty is remembering. Plato picks up this idea from Parmenides.

The way of doxa implies for Parmenides that in this illusory world it is worth the struggle for truth to escape the ignorance of the mob.

Two amazing scientific discoveries of Parmenides: he was the first to write that:
- The world is a sphere.
- Moonlight is reflected sunlight.

Conclusion: The achievement of Parmenides (i.e., Parmenides’ “firsts”).
1. Gave us logic. Clear and distinct propositions that are non-contingent: they depend on nothing other than themselves to be true, or they depend on another absolutely non-contingent proposition.
2. Showed the 3 necessary characteristics of and conditions for authentic ontology (longing, stillness, logic).
3. Showed us the one necessary proposition of which we can be certain (“Being is”).
4. Showed us that our freedom or salvation depends on certainty (certain, rather than contingent, knowledge). I.e., it does not depend on anything we do or believe.
5. The principle of Ex nihilo.
6. The distinction between necessary and contingent propositions.
7. Clear understanding that the human condition is primarily characterized by illogical thinking that tries to combine Being with nonbeing. Plato would describe this as living in a dark cave of ignorance and violence.
8. Certainty about what is really important is remembering something we forgot when we came into this world. (Hence the importance of gentle childbirth.)
9. The importance of clear thinking, or science, even in this confused world. However, we can never be absolutely certain about this world. Scientific truths can never be certainties, only highly refined opinions.
10. Showed that reality is one and formless, it has no parts, levels, or degrees. Absolute, logical, anti-materialism. The material world is an illusion, only Being/God is real.
11. Showed that motion and change are impossible, thus illusions. (To believe they are real is a commitment to irrationality.)

Next, after Parmenides and Zeno:

- Next we will look at to the teachings of Emptiness and the Two Truths of the Buddhist philosopher, Nagarjuna (Prof. Eckel’s lecture), which exactly parallel Parmenides’ teaching.