

## The Eleatic School

In our exploration of ancient philosophy, we now turn from the Ionian School to the Eleatic School, transitioning from the west coast of modern-day Turkey to the western coast of Italy, specifically to Elea. While not all figures discussed fit neatly into the Eleatic School, they share a distinctive outlook—a focus on **Being** rather than **Becoming**.

### Transition from Becoming to Being

In the Ionian School, philosophers like Thales, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus sought foundational elements such as water, air, or fire to explain ultimate reality. Their inquiries resembled proto-scientific attempts to locate material origins for all things. The Eleatic School, however, rejected the notion that reality's fundamental questions could be answered by material elements alone. They shifted focus to **Being** (capital B), emphasizing its unchanging, eternal nature over the transient world of Becoming.

#### Parmenides: The Pioneer of Being

Parmenides of Elea stands as the central figure of this school. Writing in the early 5th century BC, his philosophy represents a radical departure from earlier thought. For Parmenides, Being is the ultimate starting point for philosophy.

#### *The Way of Truth vs. The Way of Belief*

Parmenides' key work, a poem titled *Peri Phuseos* (On Nature), narrates a journey of a young man who meets a goddess. The goddess teaches him the tools to discern truth from belief:

- **Aletheia** (Truth): The way of understanding ultimate reality.
- **Doxa** (Belief): The domain of appearances and opinions.

*"What is, is. What is not, is not."*

Parmenides argues that **Being** is indivisible and eternal. If something exists, it always has and always will. Becoming, or the idea that things can come into or go out of existence, is illusory.

### ***Critique of Sense Perception***

Parmenides emphasized the unreliability of sensory experience, advocating for reliance on reason to grasp reality. While the senses suggest a world of change and diversity, reason reveals a singular, unchanging unity.

### **The Problem of "Is"**

Parmenides' philosophy hinges on the Greek word *esti* (is), which encompasses both existence (*Socrates is*) and predication (*Socrates is wise*). This linguistic ambiguity led to philosophical challenges, as it conflates different uses of "is" and complicates discussions of Being.

## **Empedocles and the Elements**

Empedocles of Acragas built on Parmenides' framework but sought to reconcile Being with the apparent diversity of Becoming. He proposed:

1. Four fundamental elements: **fire, air, water, earth**.
2. Two opposing forces: **love** (attraction) and **strife** (repulsion).

Through the interplay of these elements and forces, Empedocles explained the world's apparent diversity while adhering to the Eleatic commitment to an unchanging Being.

## **Anaxagoras: Infinite Divisibility**

Anaxagoras introduced the concept of **homoeomeroi** (like parts), asserting that everything contains a portion of everything else. For example:

- Gold remains gold no matter how finely it is divided.
- Reality is infinitely divisible ("gunky") rather than consisting of indivisible units.

Anaxagoras also introduced the concept of **nous** (mind), an organizing intelligence that brings order to the cosmos. This idea resonated deeply with later thinkers, including Socrates and Plato.

### **The Role of Nous**

*"Mind is the cause of all order and beauty in the world."*

Anaxagoras' nous represented a groundbreaking move toward understanding reality as fundamentally intelligible and ordered by a rational principle.

### **Pythagoras: Numbers and Harmony**

Though not strictly part of the Eleatic School, Pythagoras of Samos shared its commitment to uncovering ultimate principles. For Pythagoras:

1. Reality is a **kosmos**, an orderly and harmonious whole.
2. **Numbers** and mathematical relationships underpin this order.
3. Music, as "number in motion," exemplifies the cosmic harmony.

### **The Tetraktys**

Pythagoras revered the tetraktys, a triangular arrangement of the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 that sums to 10. This symbolized the foundational role of mathematical relationships in the cosmos.

*"The world is built on the power of numbers."*

Pythagoras' insights paved the way for later developments in philosophy and science, where mathematics became central to understanding physical reality.

### **The Legacy of the Eleatic School**

The Eleatic School's emphasis on Being and its critiques of sensory perception laid the groundwork for metaphysics. Parmenides' rationalism influenced Plato's Theory of Forms, while Empedocles and Anaxagoras bridged the gap between Eleatic monism and Ionian pluralism. Pythagoras' mathematical vision of the cosmos remains a cornerstone of Western thought.

In our next lecture, we will explore Plato's synthesis of these ideas, merging Being and Becoming into a unified philosophical vision.