

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W
Spring 2012
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Class #7: The Oneness of Being and
the Paradoxes of Motion
Parmenides' Poem

Business

- The first paper is due now.
- Second paper assignment
 - Compare and contrast
 - Limited topics
- Starting: Heavy-Duty Metaphysics
 - space
 - time
 - motion

Putting Aside our Skepticism

- We have been wondering about the reality of the external world.
 - Descartes's First-Meditation skepticism
 - Locke's empiricist arguments for the existence of a material world
 - Berkeley's empiricist idealism
 - The skeptical views that motivated both Moore and Wittgenstein.
- Maybe Moore is right that its existence is obvious and easily demonstrated.
- Maybe Kant and Wittgenstein are correct that our very actions presume already the existence of the external world.
- We can also put aside Berkeley's idealism, and assume that the world is a physical world.

What is The World Like?

- Descartes and Locke argued for a contrast between appearance and reality.
- The world is particles in motion
- Motion is displacement over time.
- Time is just a fourth dimension of the world, not essentially different from space.
 - Our best theories of the world posit at least three spatial dimensions and a fourth temporal one.
 - Some physical theories posit many more dimensions than that.

Parmenides and the Appearance/Reality Distinction

- Some of the earliest known concerns about the distinction between appearance and reality come from the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides.
- He argued that all change, including motion, is an illusion.
- Parmenides agreed with us that we need not be skeptical about the existence of an external world.
- He denied that it had the properties which we ordinarily ascribe to it.
 - the way of truth
 - the impossibility of falsehood

Falsehood is Impossible

Plato's *Sophist*

- NL1. Uttering a falsehood is saying what is not.
- NL2. That which is not has no sort of being.
- NL3. When I say something, it has at least some sort of being.
- NLC. So, uttering a falsehood is impossible.

Parmenides' claim, NL2

NL1. Lying is saying what is not.

NL2. That which is not has no sort of being.

NL3. When I say something, it has at least some sort of being.

NLC. So, lying is impossible.

- “What is for being and for thinking must be; for it can be, and nothing can not.”
- ‘That’ attributes singularity, which is some sort of being.
- To speak or think falsely is to say what is not.
- But what is not can not exist and so can not be described.
- You can't say anything true about nothing.

Parmenidean Oneness

- What does exist, for Parmenides, is what he calls being, or the One.
- Being has no beginning.
 - If being had a beginning, there would have to be an earlier time at which being did not exist.
- Similarly, being can not cease.
 - If being were to cease, then there would be a later time when what is is not.
- What is can never change.
 - If what exists were to change, then some aspect of what is would not be, or some aspect of what is would not have been.

Zeno's Paradoxes

- Each paradox is supposed to show something contradictory about the possibility of change.
- We are going to look at four of those paradoxes in a group exercise called a jigsaw.
- Start briefly in base groups.
 - Each member of each group chooses one of four paradoxes to study.
- Then, you will all move to your work groups.
 - Each work group is focused on the study of one paradox.

Questions

■ For Work Groups

1. What assumptions about space, motion, or time does Zeno make? Are these assumptions commonsensical? Are they defensible?
2. Can the paradox be solved by abandoning one or more assumptions?
3. Consider the standard solution. Are there alternatives?

■ For Base Groups

Take turns teaching the other members of the group about your paradox.

1. How are the standard solutions similar?
2. Do Zeno's paradoxes point to a serious worry about motion?
3. Can we solve the paradoxes without denying the existence of change?

Plato's Response to Parmenides

Assertions are divided into nouns and verbs.

- Stranger: [T]here are two sorts of intimation of being which are given by the voice.
- Theaetetus: What are they?
- Stranger: One of them is called nouns, and the other verbs.
- Theaetetus: Describe them.
- Stranger: That which denotes action we call a verb.
- Theaetetus: True.
- Stranger: And the other, which is an articulate mark set on those who do the actions, we call a noun.
- Theaetetus: Quite true.
- Stranger: A succession of nouns only is not a sentence any more than of verbs without nouns...I mean that words like "walks," "runs," "sleeps," or any other words which denote action, however many of them you string together, do not make discourse.
- Theaetetus: How can they?
- Stranger: Or, again, when you say "lion," "stag," "horse," or any other words which denote agents. Neither in this way of stringing words together do you attain to discourse, for there is no expression of action or inaction, or of the existence of existence or non-existence indicated by the sounds, until verbs are mingled with nouns. Then the words fit, and the smallest combination of them forms language, and is the simplest and least form of discourse (*Sophist* 2-3).

How Plato's Response Weighs Against Parmenides' View

- Falsity ('Theaetetus flies') results from combining a noun and a verb which do not go together in reality.
- NL1 is shown false because lying is not merely saying what is not.
- At least some form of lying is saying of what is some quality that it does not have.
- That which is not (e.g. 'Theaetetus flies') thus may have has some sort of being.
- It can be a false attribution of a property to a real object, e.g. Theaetetus.