

# A Second Wave



*Staking out the Terrain*

# Parmenides and the Assault *A Posteriori* Knowledge

1. If we have any *a posteriori* knowledge, then we are able to know that there are plurality and change.
2. We are not able to know that there are plurality and change.
3. Hence, we have no *a posteriori* knowledge.

# Two Presuppositions

- ❖ The Relational Theory of Thinking (RT): Every instance of thinking involves a thinker standing in relation to something thought.
- ❖ The Co-extensivity of Thinking and Being (CTB): It is possible to think any arbitrary  $o$  if, and only if,  $o$  exists.

# The Dominant Parmenidean Argument

1. It is not possible to think nothing.
  2. It is possible to conceive of generation only if it is possible to think nothing.
  3. Hence, it is not possible to conceive of generation.
  4. It is possible to conceive of alteration only if it is possible to conceive of generation.
  5. It is, by (3), not possible to conceive of generation.
  6. Hence, it is not possible to conceive of alteration.
  7. It is possible for there to be alteration only if it is possible to conceive of alteration.
  8. Hence, it is impossible for there to be alteration.
- ❖ N.b. We can now run the argument once more, substituting 'distinctness' for 'generation' and 'plurality' for 'alteration'.

# An Atomistic Saviour?

- ❖ Leucippus . . . did not follow the same route as Parmenides and Xenophanes concerning things that are, but seemingly the opposite one. For while they made the universe one, immovable, ungenerated, and limited, and did not even permit the investigation of what-is-not, he posited the atoms as infinite and ever-moving elements, with an infinite number of shapes, on the grounds that they are no more like this than like that and because he observed that coming-to-be and change are unceasing among the things that are. Further, he posited that what-is is no more than what-is-not, and both are equally causes of things that come to be. For supposing the substance of the atoms to be compact and full, he said it is what-is and that it moves in the void, which he called “what-is-not” and which he declares is no less than what-is. His associate, Democritus of Abdera, likewise posited the full and the void as principles, of which he calls the former “what-is” and the latter “what-is-not.” For positing the atoms as matter for the things that are, they generate the rest by means of their differences. (6 = *Simpl. in Aris. Phys.* 28.4-10 = 67A8)

# Agreement and Divergence

- ❖ Agreement:

- ❖ There are motion and diversity only if there is what-is-not.

- ❖ Divergence

- ❖ Parmenides:

- ❖ Since there are motion and diversity only if there is what-is-not, and what-is-not is not and cannot be, there are neither motion nor diversity.

- ❖ The Atomists:

- ❖ Since there are motion and diversity only if there is what-is-not, and plainly motion and diversity are, the what-is-not is.

- ❖ Let us call it the void:

- ❖ 'Leucippus and his associate Democritus declare the full and the void to be the elements, calling the former "what-is" (to on) and the other "what-is-not" (*to mê on*). Of these, the one, "what-is," is full and solid, the other, "what-is-not," is the void and rare.' (3 = Ar. *Met.* = 985b4-10 = 657a6)

# Naive Realism

- ❖ We mainly begin as naive realists about perception.
- ❖ Naive realism holds:
  - Two plausible assumptions about perception:
    - Perceptual qualities are intrinsic, monadic properties of objects in our perceptual environments.
    - Perceptual objects are perceived directly, rather than indirectly.
      - If I see a blue lake before me, then I do not manage to do so by seeing my image of a blue lake and then, based upon this perception, infer that the lake before me is blue.

# The Variability of Perception

1. If  $S_1$  perceives some object  $o$  to be  $\phi$  and  $S_2$  perceives the same  $o$  to be not- $\phi$ , where  $\phi$  is a random perceptual quality, then  $o$  is neither  $\phi$  nor not- $\phi$  *in itself*.
2. It often happens in perception that  $S_1$  perceives  $o$  to be  $\phi$  while  $S_2$  perceives  $o$  to be not- $\phi$ .
3. Hence, for any random perceptual quality  $\phi$ , no object  $o$  is either  $\phi$  or not- $\phi$  in itself.

# To Illustrate

- ❖ Sandra and Bentley take a sip from the same glass of wine. She think it's bitter; he thinks it's sweet. So:
  1. If Sandra perceives some wine to be bitter and Bentley perceives the same wine to be sweet then the wine is neither sweet nor not-sweet *in itself*.
  2. This sometimes happens.
  3. So, wine is neither sweet nor not-sweet in itself.

# Another

- ❖ Fernando, fresh from the sauna, and Anke, just returning from the slopes, each places a hand in a tub of water. She think it's warm; he thinks it's cool. So:
  1. If Fernando perceives some water to be cool and Anke perceives the same water to be warm, then the water is neither warm nor nor cool *in itself*.
  2. This sometimes happens.
  3. So, water is neither warm nor cool in itself.

# Why (1)?

- ❖ There seem to be only four possibilities, on the assumption of naive realism:
  1.  $S_1$  is wrong and  $S_2$  is right.
  2.  $S_1$  is right and  $S_2$  is wrong.
  3. They're both right.
  4. They're both wrong.
- ❖ Since none of these is acceptable, naive realism must be false.

# A Sophistic Extension

- ❖ Protagoras the Sophist:

- ❖ ‘A person is the measure of all things—of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not.’ (8 = Sextus, AM 7.60 = 80B1)

- ❖ Alt: ‘A human being is the measure of what is [φ], that it is [φ], and of what is not [φ], that it is not [φ].’

- ❖ Three uses of the verb *to be* (*einai*; εἶναι):

- ❖ predicative: x is φ

- ❖ The Prime Minister is a cad.

- ❖ identity: x is y

- ❖ The Prime Minister is the First Lord of the Treasury.

- ❖ existential: x is [*scil.* x exists]

- ❖ ‘To be or not to be—that is the question: /Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer/The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,/Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,/And, by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep’ (*Hamlet*, iii 1)

# The Measure Doctrine

- ❖ Two formulations, one positive, one negative:
  - ❖  $MD_{\text{pos}}$ : If  $o$  seems  $\phi$  to  $S$ , then  $o$  is  $\phi$  (for  $S$ )
  - ❖  $MD_{\text{neg}}$ : For any arbitrary proposition  $p$ , if  $S_1$  believes  $p$  and  $S_2$  believes not- $p$ , then there is no fact of the matter as to whether  $S_1$  or  $S_2$  is correct.
- ❖ Incredible as it stands, but restricted to moral matters?

# The Variability of Moral Perception

1. If  $S_1$  perceives some action  $a$  to be  $\phi$  and  $S_2$  perceives the same  $a$  to be not- $\phi$ , where  $\phi$  is a random moral quality, then  $a$  is neither  $\phi$  nor not- $\phi$  *in itself*.
2. It often happens in perception that  $S_1$  perceives  $a$  to be  $\phi$  while  $S_2$  perceives  $a$  to be not- $\phi$ .
3. Hence, for any random moral quality  $\phi$ , no object  $a$  is either  $\phi$  or not- $\phi$  in itself.

# To Illustrate

- ❖ Marcus believes that positive euthanasia is morally permissible; Christina thinks it is never permissible.
  1. If Marcus perceives an action to be morally permissible and Christina perceives it as impermissible, then the action is neither permissible nor impermissible *in itself*.
  2. This sometimes happens; it is simply a fact that there are moral disagreements.
  3. So, no action is morally permissible or impermissible *in itself*.
- ❖ Rather, Alt: 'A human being is the measure of what is [right/wrong], that it is [right/wrong], and of what is not [right/wrong], that it is not [right/wrong].'