

"Nothing Comes from Nothing" and Parmenides

Post by "Matt" of January 21, 2021 at 9:00 AM

Nothing comes from nothing...this is surely getting deep now.

I feel Parmenides bursting out saying "this is my thing folks!"

"And it's my thing because my "thing" is something, and that which is no "thing" cannot be since some "thing" already is. Nothing cannot be!"

I believe Parmenides held that the universe must always be, because it exists. If nothing existed, there would be no universe. But since something "is" then nothing cannot be.

Post by "Matt" of January 21, 2021 at 9:07 AM

I guess it stands to "reason" that all things come from something. Even creation in the biblical sense and in many other myths is not truly ex nihilo.

"In the beginning (pre-existing object) created the heaven and the earth."

All things must have previously existed from eternity. Based on Parmenidean principles...if the universe exists it exists from eternity (in whatever form). And since something DOES exist, since even one atom exists, the concept of nothing is upended.

This is not to say that void does not exist, void and nothing are conceptually different. Void conceptually is the "space" between "things".

Post by "Matt" of January 21, 2021 at 9:24 AM

Should I move my something and nothing comments to a new thread? I could legitimately discuss this all day.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 9:31 AM

Yes Matt I think that would be a good idea. The Something From Nothing issue is definitely an example of what we are talking about, but if we focus on it too much it might get the thread off track. It certainly deserves a thread of its own. I will take care of it now.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 9:34 AM

Awesome! Thanks!

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 9:35 AM

Maybe more elaborate title for the thread Matt? What would you suggest? Post it here and I will make the change and then delete some of these housekeeping comments.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 9:37 AM

“Nothing comes from Nothing and Parmenides” as the title?

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 9:42 AM

So is Parmenides the one who advocated a "plenum" and that there is no such thing as void? Or is this more of a formal logical proof? And if so, of what?

If you're really into this Matt and would like to explain the background to those of us who don't know, that would be a good use of this thread in the forum. Whether it would be a good use of your time might be another question 😊 But if you'd enjoy writing it I feel sure that some of us

would benefit from / enjoy reading your summary of it.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 9:47 AM

I believe it had to do with a general ontological concept of the eternity of the universe.

That if nothing truly existed, there would be no universe. But since something is... And we know that for a fact, nothing cannot be. Had nothing “existed”, nothing would ever be.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 9:48 AM

He may have gone on to try to disprove void, I actually don't know if that's true, I'd have to look it up. He may have.

But for my purposes I see this as an important thought experiment for recognizing the eternity of the material universe.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 9:52 AM

I think Aristotle said that Parmenides ideas were “at the doorstep of madness.” But really discussing NO-thing and Something is important to Epicurean ideas.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 9:58 AM

[Quote from Matt](#)

But for my purposes I see this as an important thought experiment for recognizing the eternity of the material universe.

And at the very least Parmenides represents (as I understand it) one of the major views at the time of Epicurus, so his students would have been aware of it and thus some of his positions may be directed at it -- we can't recognize that if we don't know what Parmenides argued.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:02 AM

I'll go see if I can find some good information on Parmenides the post here.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:08 AM

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_comes_from_nothing

The idea that "nothing comes from nothing", as articulated by [Parmenides](#), first appears in [Aristotle's *Physics*](#):

τί δ' ἄν μιν καὶ χρέος ὤρσεν ὕστερον ἢ πρόσθεν, τοῦ μηδενὸς ἀρξάμενον, φύν;
οὕτως ἢ πάμπαν πελέναι χρεῶν ἔστιν ἢ οὐχί.

[1]

The above, in a translation based on the [John Burnet](#) translation, appears as follows:

“Yet why would it be created later rather than sooner, if it came from nothing; so, it must either be created altogether or not [created at all].”

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:10 AM

[Karl Popper](#) wrote:

“So what was really new in Parmenides was his axiomatic-deductive method, which [Leucippus](#) and [Democritus](#) turned into a hypothetical-deductive method, and thus

made part of scientific methodology.”

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 10:18 AM

It seems to me that Epicurus/Lucretius' version is clearly enough based at least in part on the observation that we do not see things being created from nothing, and therefore there is no reason to think that anything could be created from nothing by a god or by any other means. This kind of reasoning is discussed fairly clearly if I recall in "On Methods of Inference." To me that whole chain of reasoning is a fairly understandable inference of a deduction based on that which has been observed to be true. It's not just an assertion based on logic but one that is grounded in observation for it's persuasiveness.

I don't see Parmenides' version being in the same league as it does not seem to be based on observation - or is it? Matt can you reword it into something more plain?

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:19 AM

And yes he apparently did try to argue that void was nothing and nothing is not possible, but I would contend that purely from a conceptual standpoint on the existence of the universe, his position of something “being” as opposed to nothing ever being...is sound. In my mind at least.

I don't see conceptually how anything comes from nothing...

If we are talking about physics like vacuum fluctuation states etc. you are still talking about a “concept” a thing born of something. It's still not NO-thing since it is a concept. Nothing cannot be a concept.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 10:21 AM

[Quote from Matt](#)

but I would contend that purely from a conceptual standpoint on the existence of the universe, his position of something “being” as opposed to nothing ever being...is sound. In my mind at least.

But when you say it is sound it IS purely "word-play" based on definitions -- or No? Is any "observation" involved?

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:21 AM

Parmenides clearly was basing his argument on logical, not observable grounds.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 10:22 AM

Ha ha -- this is where I would think we would be better off saying "formal logical grounds" or "abstract logical grounds" because what you are saying is that he is relying on logic (word-play; concepts) alone without any evidence, correct?

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:24 AM

Yes word play based on definitions, but sufficiently strong enough of a wordplay coupled with our own observations to make a very strong argument for it being true.

There would be no observable evidence of the opposite of his theory of “something” as opposed to “nothing” because we would not exist to theorize it or observe it.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:26 AM

Nothing would rule supreme!

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:31 AM

Since even one “atom” exists, the idea of true nothing which would have no ability to create or manifest anything cannot be...it argues for the eternity of matter existing perpetually.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 10:41 AM

Matt how do you see this relating to the way Epicurus analyzed the question. My gut reaction is that what you are describing is such high-level logic, based so strongly on the word definitions without any connections with observations in "this" world, that Epicurus would not recommend relying on such an argument. I could be wrong, but this might be a good example to show that Epicurean logic as described in Lucretius and Philodemus always starts with that which is observable and rests primarily on what we do and do not observe. However I may be misunderstanding the Parmenides position.

It's in this respect that I strongly agree with what I think is or what I think should be Elayne's main point -- that use of "pure logic" as a reasonable grounds for making big conclusions is to be ruled out as an acceptable method. In fact I might say that it sounds like Parmenides's argument would suffer from the same problems as we are discussing to be the problem with hypotheticals and abstractions in the first place -- there are too many assumptions being made for someone who is grounded in the evidence of the senses to have confidence in the result.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 10:50 AM

I would argue that the simple fact that we observe “anything” tells us that there is “something” as opposed to this ontological concept of nothing. Its not replacing the Epicurean or Lucretian formula but if anything bolstering it from a logical perspective in my opinion.

The mere fact that Parmenides used the Epicurean Canon of his observation of things within his lifetime since he was a physical human being like us tells us he observed things like you and I do. He made his logical very abstract argument based on observations of reality just like we do. He saw a rock and knew it was a thing and not nothing.

We simply cannot argue the opposite of this concept because it's impossible.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 11:03 AM

I mean ultimately this is a very high level ontological concept explaining the very nature of why something is as opposed to not ever being.

If the opposite were true nothing would exist and we wouldn't be able to discuss it.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 11:06 AM

[Quote from Matt](#)

We simply cannot argue the opposite of this concept because it's impossible.

1. I wonder if the Epicureans would use the word "inconceivable" rather than "impossible."
 2. I wonder if the meaning of both of the words "impossible" and "inconceivable" would be discussed as part of a program of Epicurean instruction.
 3. I wonder if, absent some form of "logic from first principles" it is even possible to use words like "impossible" or "inconceivable" in an understandable manner.
 4. I wonder if the need to label things as "possible/impossible" or "conceivable/inconceivable" would be an argument why an "observation is everything" approach might not be considered as a sufficient philosophy of life by Epicurus. (Or maybe he would say it would be OK - Frances Wright was willing to put essentially those words in his mouth).
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Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 11:11 AM

Matt this discussion takes me back to another passage of "A Few Days In Athens" I always questioned, from Chapter 14. where Wright has Epicurus say:

Quote

To *deny* the existence of the gods would indeed be presumption in a philosopher; a presumption equaled only by that of him who should *assert* their existence.”

“How!” exclaimed the youth, with a countenance in which astonishment seemed to suspend every other expression.

“As I never saw the gods, my son,” calmly continued the Sage, “I cannot *assert* their existence; and, that I never saw them, is no reason for my *denying* it.”

“But do we believe nothing except that of which we have ocular demonstration?”

“Nothing, at least, for which we have not the evidence of one or more of our senses; that is, when we believe on just grounds, which, I grant, taking men collectively, is very seldom.”

First, I don't think this accurately reflects Epicurus' position at all, and it seems mighty presumptuous to me that Wright put these words in Epicurus' mouth. But, having got that observation out of the way, we should ask:

What should WE think of this? Is it correct? Is it the position we should take today? How does it fit with Epicurus' and Parmenides' arguments?

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 11:15 AM

Don't get me wrong this stuff absolutely makes my brain smoke and my head hurt with idealist abstraction. It is for sure conceptual word play at its heart...

Whatever Parmenides posited beyond this ONE argument (I made a bad joke there)... the Parmenidean One.....

I don't particularly need to know what else he posited since his end goal was not pleasure. This one particular argument bolsters my subjective analysis of the universe based on the Epicurean Canon.

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 11:19 AM

The [Epicurean gods](#) are something. If nothing was, they would not theoretically be if they do in fact exist.

Because existence is...the [Epicurean gods](#) have an infinitely greater chance of existing rather than not....if nothing was.

□□

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 11:24 AM

Because there is something, the [Epicurean gods](#) have a potential of being. Based on Epicurean physics.

Based on Parmenidean logic they have a chance of existing that is greater than “not ever.”

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 11:41 AM

Matt (or anyone) separate and apart from Parmenides, what do you think about these questions?

[Quote from Cassius](#)

2. I wonder if the meaning of both of the words "impossible" and "inconceivable" would be discussed as part of a program of Epicurean instruction.
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Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 11:51 AM

I’m just grabbing some lunch and I’ll be back to ponder on those.

I’m going to get myself a Greek gyro to help my thinking.

Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 3:14 PM

Remember the forum is "asynchronous" -- I am being called away to "real world" work right now myself!

Post by “Bryan” of January 21, 2021 at 3:31 PM

"Observation is everything" is the position of a type of skeptic, who does not want to form a workable and understandable mental model of how nature works. We are far closer to "everything we think we base on observation, and we infer by analogy from this empirical basis in order to conceive that which cannot be observed."

Post by “Elli” of January 21, 2021 at 5:27 PM

Hi friends. Hello Bryan. There is an anecdotal story of what people were thinking about the Ionian natural philosophers, as also they called, by academics, pre-socratics.

As an exaggeration, people said that those philosophers were famous to observe and hearing even the coolness dripping on a leaf, and after their observations they drew some of their own conclusions.

There is an anecdotal story with Democritus that will make Matt to smile. 😊

One morning, they say, Democritus met a girl that she lived in his neighborhood, so he greeted her, saying:

- Good morning Girl.

One night, the same girl, had intercourse with a man.

And when Democritus met her the next morning, he kindly greeted her saying:

- Good morning woman. 😊

Post by “Bryan” of January 21, 2021 at 5:56 PM

Hello Elli, yes that is right on topic, very amusing, and new to me! Thank you.

Post by “Elli” of January 21, 2021 at 5:58 PM

No, please do not mention anything about Parmenides to Elayne, she will be upset and we will confront and some other troubles. Parmenides was the great fiesta of idealists Plato and Socrates. All of their thoughts were inspired from him. Parmenids is against Epicurus, and sometimes some persons confuse Epicurus ideas with him. Parmenides conclusions are against to the manifold way of epicurean canon the swerve and the experiences that are testified by our senses and feelings.

Since Parmenides said this : All reality is one thing, change is impossible, and existence is timeless, uniform, and necessary. In the way to form an opinion, he explains the world of appearances, in which one's sensory faculties lead to conceptions which are false and deceitful.



Post by “Cassius” of January 21, 2021 at 6:09 PM

[Quote from elli](#)

No, please do not mention anything about Parmenides to Elayne, she will be upset and we will confront and some other troubles. Parmenides was the great fiesta of idealists

Plato and Socrates.

Sounds like all of us, and not just Elayne would line up against Parmenides. The trick would be articulating exactly WHY and WHERE we think he went wrong.

Tentatively I would say that we should apply the same analysis - that it is not Parmenides use of logic in general, but his specific application of logic and reasoning to the problem, in that he failed to ground his initial premises sufficiently in the observation of the senses, and to tie the steps in his chain of reasoning to reality verifiable through the senses.

But since I've yet to really figure out Parmenides' chain of reasoning, or his conclusions either, I can't say even that with confidence. If one of his conclusions was "motion is impossible" then we can attack that with confidence, but I can't get a fix on what his other conclusions were all about.

Post by "Cassius" of January 21, 2021 at 6:37 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

"Observation is everything" is the position of a type of skeptic, who does not want to form a workable and understandable mental model of how nature works.

Bryan put "observation is everything" in quotes, and I do think that is a very fair summary of the Wright position. But since I want to be rigorously fair in the assertion (again I agree with Bryan) that this amounts to a form of skepticism. That's a serious charge, and anyone evaluating whether it is justified ought to consider this passage from Chapter 15 of *A Few Days in Athens*. There is more in her later "Course of Popular Lectures" but since these are the words she places in the voice of Leontium as representing core Epicurean doctrine, this deserves special scrutiny.

Quote

You have heard of, and studied various systems of philosophy; but real philosophy is opposed to all systems. Her whole business is observation; and the results of that observation constitute all her knowledge. She receives no truths, until she has tested them by experience; she advances no opinions, unsupported by the testimony of facts; she acknowledges no virtue, but that involved in beneficial actions; no vice, but that involved in actions hurtful to ourselves or to others. Above all, she advances no

dogmas, — is slow to assert what is, — and calls nothing impossible. The science of philosophy is simply a science of observation, both as regards the world without us, and the world within; and, to advance in it, are requisite only sound senses, well developed and exercised faculties, and a mind free of prejudice. The objects she has in view, as regards the external world, are, first, to see things as they are, and secondly, to examine their structure, to ascertain their properties, and to observe their relations one to the other. — As respects the world within, or the philosophy of mind, she has in view, first, to examine our sensations, or the impressions of external things on our senses; which operation involves, and is involved in, the examination of those external things themselves: secondly, to trace back to our sensations, the first development of all our faculties; and again, from these sensations, and the exercise of our different faculties as developed by them, to trace the gradual formation of our moral feelings, and of all our other emotions: thirdly, to analyze all these our sensations, thoughts, and emotions, — that is, to examine the qualities of our own internal, sentient matter, with the same, and yet more, closeness of scrutiny, than we have applied to the examination of the matter that is without us finally, to investigate the justness of our moral feelings, and to weigh the merit and demerit of human actions; which is, in other words, to judge of their tendency to produce good or evil, — to excite pleasurable or painful feelings in ourselves or others. You will observe, therefore, that, both as regards the philosophy of physics, and the philosophy of mind, all is simply a process of investigation. It is a journey of discovery, in which, in the one case, we commission our senses to examine the qualities of that matter, which is around us, and, in the other, endeavor, by attention to the varieties of our consciousness, to gain a knowledge of those qualities of matter which constitute our susceptibilities of thought and feeling.”

Post by “Elli” of January 21, 2021 at 6:43 PM

Heraclitus answered to Parmenides with these two words : “μεταβάλλον αναπαύεται» (metavalon anapavetai) i.e. “in rest is changing”, and that means we may perceive the environment/the Universe as to be static but in the same time it evolves i.e. it is changing/moving. 😊

Post by “Matt” of January 21, 2021 at 6:53 PM

That is a funny anecdotal story [Elli](#).



After all I am Laughing Democritus!

Just so we are clear I'm not a great lover of Parmenides in general. I'm simply using his ideas on being and nothing to help conceptualize something that I'm sure is very troubling for many people...envisioning an eternal universe.

I mean whether we are talking about big bangs, singularities, collapsing fifth dimensional universes, steady state universes etc. there is the need to conceptualize this principle of the eternal universe. Something does not come from nothing ex nihilo.

If I was a Neoplatonist I would say the aggregate One manifests the universe and chain of being perpetually through emanationism. In the eternal now. None of that is provable in reality or observable. But they also held to an eternal universe. I believe the Aristotelians did too, as do many "eastern" philosophies that shall not be named here.

Also again even the biblical narratives and myths like Zurvanism in Iranian philosophy held to the notion of a pre-existing "thing"...god, principle,etc that either creates or simply manifests the universe, often from "itself" or a slain enemy like a dragon etc. like Tiamat in Babylonian myth. Creatio ex nihilo in concept anyway simply isn't feasible...since everyone, no matter who, has a first principle.

Post by "Matt" of January 21, 2021 at 6:58 PM

I think as far as we Epicureans go, it depends on how far we want to defend the position of an eternal universe. Getting into modern physics and other philosophical arguments beyond the more simple assertions.

I think there is ample observable and logical evidence that the universe is eternal. It may go through "changes" but those changes really make no difference to me as an Epicurean.

It's easy enough to say it's eternal and move on with my day seeking out pleasure.

Post by "Matt" of January 21, 2021 at 7:22 PM

With all that being said with modern physics, Parmenides and a host of exhausting (monstrous) eastern philosophies being brought up as a comparison...I'm satisfied with the Lucretian and Epicurean assertion of the eternal universe.

However it actually looks or looked doesn't ultimately have a bearing on my pleasurable living.

I'm happy with laughing about Democritus's keen observations of the changes in female sexual evolution rather than going mad worrying about first principals, but I'm always willing to go there! ☐☐

Post by "Cassius" of January 21, 2021 at 7:55 PM

[Quote from Matt](#)

If I was a Neoplatonist I would say the aggregate One manifests the universe and chain of being perpetually through emanationism. In the eternal now.

And the probable best response if you were to say that would be: "*What weed are you smoking?*" 😊

Post by "Matt" of January 21, 2021 at 8:50 PM

Hahaha that's real Neoplatonist terminology!

Should you wonder why I embraced materialism and Epicureanism? ☐☐