I

Parmenides' argument for the impossibility of change so dominated Greek thinking that we can expect it to loom large in Aristotle's discussion of coming to be in Physics A, and we are not disappointed. After presenting his own analysis of coming to be in Physics A.7, Aristotle devotes all of A.8 to the argument. He formulates it as follows:

They say that no one of the things that are comes to be or passes away since it is necessary for that which comes to be to come to be from that which is or from that which is not, and both of these are impossible. For that which is does not come to be since it already is, and nothing comes to be from that which is not. (191a 27-31)

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1. In attempting to understand Aristotle's response to the Parmenidean argument, one is struck by the fact that recent literature on A.8 seldom attempts to work through the difficult text of A.8. Those writing on the chapter typically provide inferential reconstructions of Aristotle's reply to Parmenides. As philosophically interesting as those reconstructions are, they tend to leave large chunks of the text unexplained. This paper is an attempt to identify the line of argument Aristotle actually employs in A.8. Its method is unabashedly that of extended philosophical commentary. I do not claim to have explanations of every line of the chapter, but I hope the paper goes some distance towards delineating the main contours of the argument of A.8. I make no apologies for my somewhat tedious attention to the details of Aristotle's response to Parmenides since I believe that clarity on the text of A.8 is a prerequisite to more general philosophical reflection of the sort that has typified recent literature on this chapter.
Aristotle states the conclusion of the argument as the claim that "no one of the things that are comes to be or passes away." If we assume that change invariably involves the coming into being or the passing away of something (where not just a dog, a geranium, or an oak tree but also a sunburnt human being, a running horse, and an overweight rhinoceros count as "things" that come into being and pass away), then we can take the conclusion to be a general claim precluding all change. But if the conclusion Aristotle presents is general, the argument he actually formulates for us precludes only the possibility of coming to be. He may be attributing to the Parmenidean the view that necessarily where a thing, \( x \), passes away or perishes, some other thing, \( y \), comes to be or is generated. Where a human being passes away, for example, a corpse comes into being, so if the relevant coming to be is impossible, the passing away that is necessarily concurrent with it is likewise impossible. Or it may be that Aristotle simply supposes that the argument he outlines can be applied straightforwardly to the case of passing away. Just as every coming to be must originate in that which is or that which is not, every passing away must culminate in that which is or that which is not; and Aristotle may be assuming that whatever considerations establish in the case of coming to be that neither option is possible apply, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of passing away.

In any event, Aristotle explicitly considers only the former case. It is tempting to summarize the argument he outlines as follows: given any object, \( x \), if \( x \) has come to be, then either \( x \) preexisted its coming to be or it did not; but in neither case is it possible that \( x \) came to be. If \( x \) preexisted its coming to be, then it cannot coherently be said to have come to be; it is impossible for what already exists to come to be. If, on the other hand, \( x \) did not preexist its coming to be, then \( x \)'s coming to be would require the equally incoherent emergence of something from nothing. But if that is the intuitive core of the argument, Aristotle's formulation is somewhat more exacting. The expressions 'that which is' and 'that which is not' figure prominently in his statement of the argument; and his subsequent treatment