AN ANONYMOUS ARGUMENT AGAINST MIXTURE

BY

ROSAMOND KENT SPRAGUE

Aristotle’s *de Generatione et Corruptione* I 10 (327 b 35-328 a 7) contains an interesting argument against the possibility of mixture. According to “some people”, he writes, “it is impossible for one thing to be mixed with another; for (a) if the ingredients still exist and are not altered at all, they are no more mixed than they were before, but are in a similar state; and (b) if one ingredient is destroyed they have not been mixed, but one ingredient exists while the other does not, whereas mixture is composed of ingredients which remain what they were before; and in the same way, (c) even if, both the ingredients having come together, each of them has been destroyed, there is no mixture; for things which have no existence at all cannot have been mixed” (trans. Forster).

Attempts to identify the “some people” of this passage have not been very fruitful. Joachim, in his extensive commentary, does not even take up the problem 1). Verdenius and Waszink were at first reminded of Diogenes of Apollonia DK 64 B2, but the revised edition of their *Comments* drops the suggestion, rightly, I think 2). Cherniss sees the argument as “derived from Zeno but ... not used for this purpose by Zeno himself”, and as “very probably Megarian” 3). Solmsen also mentions Zeno and thinks that the argument “may have figured in Zeno’s polemic against Empedocles’ use of mixture”, and “may have had the same form” as DK

3) H. Cherniss, *Aristotle’s Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy* (Baltimore 1935), 141 n. 564. Cherniss also sees a parallel with *Physics* 240 a 19-29, but this passage really contains a solution, not a parallel.
29 B4; that is, if Zeno can write "that which moves moves neither in the place in which it is, nor in that in which it is not", he might well have written something like "things are mixed neither if they are destroyed nor if they are not destroyed".

I think we can do a little better than this. The Zeno parallel, at least as Solmsen puts it, is not altogether helpful since it blurs the essential shape of the Aristotle argument. This argument, as Aristotle reports it, consists not of two cases to be eliminated but of three: both, neither, and one but not the other. A much closer parallel is to be found in Plato's *Euthydemus* 286 A ff., in the argument of Dionysodorus against contradiction: "Now would we be contradicting, [Dionysodorus] said, if we were both to speak the description of the same thing? I suppose we would be saying the same things in that case ... But when neither of us speaks the description of the thing, would we be contradicting then? Or wouldn't it be the case that neither of us had the thing in mind at all ... But when I speak the description of the thing, whereas you speak another description of another thing, do we contradict then? Or is it the case that I speak it but that you speak nothing at all? And how would a person who does not speak contradict one who does?"

The background of this argument is quite clearly Eleatic. At 286 A 2, as a preliminary step, Dionysodorus has established that to speak is to speak what exists (compare Parmenides DK 28 B2, 5-7). Then, in the crucial case in which "I speak the description of the thing but you speak another description of another thing" (286 B 3-4), the conclusion is drawn that to speak of something other is not to speak. (Here we may note that Plato's solution of the Parmenides problem of non-being is to differentiate the other from

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2) Or, strictly speaking of four cases: both A and B, neither A nor B, A but not B, and B but not A. (The last two come to the same thing for purposes of analysis).

3) My translation, as from Plato's "*Euthydemus*" (Indianapolis 1965).

4) Dionysodorus is cheating here; he ought to have said "another description of the same thing". The author of the Aristotle passage also cheats in (b), where he contradicts (a).