

ARISTOTLE, FIRST BOOK OF NATURAL HEARING (PHYSICS), READING FIFTEEN

Some others have touched upon the same, but not sufficiently. For they agree that something comes to be simply from what is not, insofar as Parmenides spoke rightly. Then it seems to be the same that, if something is one in number, it is also only one in ability.

But this differs much. For we say matter and lack are other. And one of these is non-being by happening, the matter; but the lack, through itself; and the one is near and a substance in some way, the matter; but the other, in no way.

Some likewise make non-being the large and the small, either together or each apart, so that this kind of triad is wholly other than that. For they got this far, that some nature should underlie, but they make this one. And even if someone makes it a duality, calling it the large and the small, nevertheless he does the same; for he overlooks the other.

The staying under nature is a cause with the form of what comes to be, as a mother. But the other part of the contrariety would seem to be (to one applying his mind) to be harmful to the same and not to be at all. For there being something divine and good and desirable, one of them we say is contrary to this.

The other however is apt to desire and want this according to its nature. But to some it would happen that the contrary desires its own corruption. But surely the form is not such as itself to desire itself because it is not needy; nor the contrary, for contraries corrupt each other; but this is the matter, as if the woman, the man, and the ugly, the beautiful - except not the ugly as such but by happening; nor the woman, but by happening.

It passes away and comes to be in one way; in another way, not. As regards what is in it, it passes away through itself - for it is the lack in it that passes away. However, according to ability, not through itself; but it is necessary for it to be ingenerable and incorruptible. for if it comes to be, it would be necessary for something first to underlie, from which it comes to be existing within, not by happening. If it passed away, it would come to this at last; so it would have passed away before it passed away.

But about the beginning as form, whether it is one or many and what sort it is, it is the work of first philosophy to determine with certitude. But concerning natural and corruptible forms, we will speak in the things to be shown later. Let it be determined thus by us that there are beginnings, and what they are and how many in number. We shall speak again, starting with another beginning.