

(Shorter abstract)

The earliest criticism of Parmenides and Zeno's purported retaliation

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In this paper the problem of the doctrinal relationship between Parmenides and Zeno will be examined anew, with an attempt to solve the question by focusing on the accounts of an early attack launched against the former by an unknown mocker. Plato's report (*Parmenides* 128c) on the alleged defensive character of Zeno's writing will be set against the testimonies of a widespread critical response to Parmenides' ontological challenge during the 5th century, so as to figure out the profile of such an early critic. This will be done by connecting Zeno's *paradoxes* against plurality and motion with a comical device (the so-called "growth argument") by the Sicilian playwright Epicharmus, containing an elaborate demonstration of the unsteadiness of being and probably developed (as I will argue) as a parodic distortion of Parmenides' doctrine.

(Longer version)

The earliest criticism of Parmenides and Zeno's purported retaliation

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The scope of this paper will be to examine anew the problem of the relationship between Parmenides and Zeno, focusing on the evidences of an early attack launched against the former by an unknown mocker and on the alleged defensive character of Zeno's writing. Based on the report provided by Plato in *Parmenides* 128c and guided by earlier researches that stress how quick and widespread was the response to Parmenides' ontological challenge during the 5th century, I will attempt to show that such an early polemic as Plato's account of Zeno's purpose implies is not at all improbable. In fact, notwithstanding the largely fictional character of Plato's setting of the fanciful encounter between Parmenides and Socrates in Athens, I will argue that Zeno's book might indeed have been written as a reaction against someone (or some people) who undertook to make fun of Parmenides' doctrine by pointing out the "many and ridiculous consequences that contradict it".

An examination of Plato's language in the passage of the *Parmenides* about Zeno's polemical intents, as my paper will show, suggests powerfully that Parmenides was derided by a comic writer, and this might also account for the gist of Zeno's *paradoxes* against plurality and motion. The ancient testimonies and the remains of Zeno's work seem indeed to indicate that he relied heavily on rhetorical devices artfully aimed at disorientating the hearers rather than just at persuading them through logical argument. This, in its turn, can be connected with the so-called "growth argument" (*aujxanovmeno* "lovgo") devised by the Sicilian playwright Epicharmus, a somewhat older contemporary of Parmenides who is credited with a keen awareness of coeval philosophical thought, against which he used to address his witty comic satire. Epicharmus' argument, in fact, through an elaborate demonstration of the unrelenting process of loss and reparation that changes everybody into a different person at any given time, exhibits the unsteadiness of being through a savory

pseudosophisticated pastiche skillfully modeled on contemporary examples of philosophical reasoning.

Therefore, my paper will argue that Epicharmus might have developed this argument as a parodic distortion of Parmenides' argumentation on the uniqueness and changelessness of Being, and again that he would have thus become one of the targets of Zeno's overwhelming defense of his teacher's doctrine. Through a detailed analysis, Epicharmus' *auxxanovmeno* " *logos*" will very probably turn up as the oldest example of sophistic reasoning, in the wake of which Zeno and even later the Sophists and other thinkers would have contrived their own challenging intellectual riddles.