

Gorgias: *On Nature or What-Is-Not*

I. Nothing Exists

1. If anything exists, it must be Being, Not-Being, or both
 2. But it cannot be any of these
 - a. It cannot be Non-Being
 - i. Non-Being does not exist
 - ii. Hence, what exists cannot be Non-Being
 - b. It cannot be both
 - i. It cannot be Non-Being
 - ii. Hence, it cannot be both
 - c. It cannot be Being
 - i. If it were Being, it must be everlasting (eternal), created (temporal), or both
 1. It is not temporal
 - a. If it is temporal, then it has a beginning
 - b. Thus it came from what is not Being (i.e., Non-Being)
 - c. But Non-Being does not exist
 - d. Hence, it is not temporal
 2. It is not both
 - a. It cannot be either eternal or temporal
 - b. Hence, it cannot be both
 3. It is not eternal
 - a. If it is eternal, then it has no beginning
 - b. Therefore it is without limit (*apeiras*) and so boundless
 - c. Therefore it has no position
 - i. To have a position is to be contained in something
 - ii. But to be boundless is not to be so contained
 1. A container is larger than what it holds
 2. But nothing is larger than the boundless
 3. Hence, the boundless is not contained
 - iii. Hence, it has no position
 - d. Therefore it is nowhere
 - e. But to exist is to be somewhere
 - f. Hence, it is not eternal
 - ii. To have a position is to be contained in something
 - iii. But to be boundless is not to be so contained
 1. A container is larger than what it holds
 2. But nothing is larger than the boundless
 3. Hence, the boundless is not contained
 - iii. Hence, it has no position
 - d. Therefore it is nowhere
 - e. But to exist is to be somewhere
 - f. Hence, it is not eternal
 - d. In addition, it cannot be one
 - i. If something exists, it has size
 - ii. But what has size can be divided into infinitely many things
 1. And even if not infinite, tripartite with length, breadth, and depth
 - iii. Hence, it cannot be one
 - e. In addition, it cannot be many
 - i. The many is made up of the addition of ones
 - ii. But the one does not exist
 - iii. Hence, it cannot be many
3. Hence, nothing exists

II. If Anything Does Exist, It Is Incomprehensible (or Unthinkable)

1. The human mind can conceive of Non-Beings
 - a. The human mind can conceive of a chariot running on the sea or of a winged man
 - b. Such things do not exist and are not realities; they are Non-Beings
 - c. Hence, the human mind can conceive of Non-Beings
2. Therefore Non-Being is the object of human thought (just as light is the object of sight, and sound is the object of hearing)
3. But if Non-Being is the object of human thought, then Being is not the object of human thought
4. Hence, the human mind is not to be trusted with Being (as the eyes are trusted with light, and the ears trusted with sound) and so existing things cannot be thought—they can only be witnessed by the senses

III. If Anything is Comprehensible, It Is Incommunicable

1. What exists is perceptible and there are no interchanges between different perceptions
 - a. For instance, that which is seen is apprehended by the perceptions of sight, that which is heard is apprehended by the perceptions of hearing
 - b. There is no way that one could see sound or hear light
2. Communication is about speech (*logos*), not about the things that exist
 - a. That which we communicate is speech, and speech is not the same thing as the things that are perceptible (i.e., it is not light or sound, though light and sound may be used to convey written or spoken speech)
 - b. Furthermore, just as the perceptibles are not interchangeable, speech cannot be equated with that which exists, which is outside of us
 - c. Therefore, speech can never exactly represent the perceptibles any more than the eye can hear or the hand smell
 - d. Hence (just as the sense organs cannot give their information to any other sense organ), speech cannot give any information about anything perceptible—it gives only information about what is spoken
3. Thus, if anything exists and is comprehensible, it is incommunicable