

First Schema: The Eleatics

Due: Friday, Jan. 23rd

A good way to prepare for writing a philosophy paper is to schematize the argument you will be treating – that is to say, to set it out in premise and conclusion form. As we saw in class, this exercise makes the task of writing much easier because it forces you to know exactly how the argument works, or, as the case may be, doesn't work.

For your first schema you may choose between two arguments. You need only schematize one. Choose thoughtfully, since you will later write your first paper based on your schema. Looking ahead to this paper, you will be required to present (in regular prose) the argument you have schematized, and then both develop a criticism of it and reply to this criticism. So you may wish to keep two things in mind as you choose your passage: how the argument of the passage would be schematized, but also whether it promises a fruitful ground for criticism and reply – in short, for philosophical discussion.

Here are the two passages and the assignment:

1. In fragments 6 through 8 (pp. 37-38), Parmenides argues for the conclusion that “It is and it is not possible for it not to be.” Another, more explicit way of putting this conclusion is: “There must be one thing, and only one thing, always.” Schematize his argument for this more explicit conclusion.

OR

2. In fragment 4 (pp. 60-61), Zeno argues in a different way for a related conclusion, which can be stated as: “There cannot be Many.” Schematize his argument for this conclusion.

You have examined the first of these authors in your logic assignment. The logical tools you used then will help you now, even if you opt for Zeno's argument. To enhance your ability to see logical form even further, review the chapter from Weston's book on ERES (“Deductive Arguments”). This chapter will teach you other logical forms besides the ones you saw in Warburton. It also shows how simple forms can be stacked upon one another to create complex, multi-step arguments (pp. 50-52 “Deductive arguments in several steps”).

As you will see, Weston provides an example of such an argument, one from Sherlock Holmes. He presents this argument first as continuous prose, but then breaks it down into premises and conclusions, arranging them as sub-arguments, and even naming the type of deduction each employs, much as we did in class with Melissus. As optional practice on your own, then, read the prose on p. 50 and next try to schematize its argument yourself. When you have finished, compare your results against Weston's. Once you have achieved confidence with so lucid an argument as Holmes', apply the same method to an Eleatic.

The result should be 1-2 pages, but no more.