

Being and Becoming

**Perspective by integrating philosophical
and scientific concepts**

Content

Introduction	3
1. Being – the law of conservation of energy	5
2. Becoming – Increasing disorder within ‘being’ – the law of entropy	6
2a. Phenomenological perspective	7
2b. The perspective of emanation	8
3. Thinking about the end of things in the infinity of time	9
4. Impact of physical laws on human behavior	
from a philosophical perspective	10
I - Illusion	10
II – Resistance	11
5. Privatio theory	11

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is increasingly dominating our lives. Because of the internet and algorithms, reality is understood less through philosophical reflection and more accepted on the basis of online opinions.

By taking an artificial detour, humanity seems to explain the phenomena occurring in the world from a “box of opinions and facts.” For lack of alternatives, we call that the reality. A “box of opinions and facts” can change if we add or remove something from it. However, due to algorithms, we are becoming less capable of seeing and evaluating different perspectives. “Reality” thus becomes more limited. Our view of the bigger picture grows more distant due to a narrowing field of vision.

A philosophical approach shows that the way in which we currently define reality with the help of the internet is a limited perspective. Philosophy is a humanities discipline, and the path of the mind is, besides being a personal challenge, enriching to the usual sensory and physical perspective of human beings. In this paper, I will draw a comparison between the “internet reality” and the insights of the philosopher Plato to clarify this. Plato is a dualistic philosopher who describes a higher reality than the one visible to us. The sensory world is merely a shadow of true reality. Plato believes that reality is dualistic and static. Parmenides, a pre-Socratic philosopher, sees change primarily as a perspective from which we perceive. Plotinus differs from both; he has a more dynamic view of reality. With the Neoplatonist Plotinus, we see that the distance between unity, the One, and the visible, lower reality we perceive becomes greater.

Clinging to the physical and sensory perspective while dismissing the power of the mind and philosophy may result from the fact that philosophy must “land” in order to be understandable and meaningful to our lives. Mind and body are one in life and well-being. It is meaningful to relate philosophy to physical laws. Modern insights from thermodynamics will therefore be connected to philosophy.

The intended relationship will be based primarily on the physical law of entropy, also known as the second law of thermodynamics. This law states that the degree of disorder increases over time. This law predicts how things become. And that is also an important philosophical concept. Through “becoming” and its direction, we seek alignment with

Plato's philosophy. He posits that the visible world is a faint reflection of "being." Being, as an unchanging substrate, has an analogy with the first law of thermodynamics. By assuming the "box of opinions and facts" as a given, we marvel less at being; we assume that "being" simply exists. One could argue that this is a systemic issue. This system, in connection with the law of entropy, can be compared to the first law of thermodynamics: the law of conservation of energy. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed from one form into another. This physical law also strongly resonates with Plato, namely in the Idea of Goodness.

This will be explained from a few perspectives: the phenomenological viewpoint of Parmenides and the notion of emanation of Plotinus. Other modern perspectives, such as dialectics (e.g., Hegel) or existentialism (e.g., Sartre), will not be discussed.

Why choose classical philosophy? Classical Antiquity is the cradle of Western civilization and has greatly influenced rational and religious development and reflection. The selection made here sharpens the conceptual framework for the philosophical meaning of the thermodynamic laws discussed. With Aristotle, this sharpening might be less relevant. For Aristotle, being has the character of potentiality, and becoming is equal to its completion. Very briefly summarized: becoming is the fulfillment of being. It is important to note that by discussing the chosen philosophers, the discussion of the topic takes on a certain character; in Plato's case, this character is dualistic.

This paper is based on general knowledge of a number of Greek philosophers and well-known physical laws. I have also considered it useful to make a brief excursion to Church Father Augustine to highlight the Western tradition. In certain cases, references to sources are provided.

The aim of this paper is to actively reflect on reality by seeking coherence in human behavior, physical laws, and philosophy.

It is meaningful to reflect on such coherence. Who makes time to investigate and contemplate about this? Why is it not possible? An important reason could be that we allow ourselves to be captured by the "arrow of time," by irreversible change. We want to control change, to experience life with euphoria, without loss or deficiency, preferably without worry or fear. Yet we are regularly confronted with these things, and sometimes even consumed by them. The resistance to fear and the aversion to and avoidance of

loss on the one hand, and the pursuit of moments of euphoria on the other, relates to our desire to control “becoming.” And the concept of becoming relates to the law of entropy. The experience of lacking euphoria and the experience of deficiency can be traced back to the idea that there is a distance between our experience and the condition we are in, and the Idea of Goodness. To explain this, the theory of *privatio* will be discussed.

The sequence of the topics to be addressed is as follows. “Being” will be compared with the law of conservation of energy (1). “Becoming” corresponds to the law of entropy (2). This will be discussed from two perspectives: phenomenology (a) and emanation (b). What happens if we extend the arrow of time to an infinite point in time? (3) What is the impact of physical laws on human behavior from a philosophical perspective? (4) Abandoning illusions (appearance) and resisting decay serve a function, because decay evokes loss and emptiness. (5. *privatio* theory)

1. Being – the law of conservation of energy

To Plato, being is a capacity or power to bring something about or to allow something to happen. “We say that being consists of power, namely the capacity to act or to be acted upon by something else.” (Sophist 248a–b)

Being is understood as a capacity and therefore has potentiality. It points to the structure and nature of reality. In this respect, it is comparable and analogous to the law of conservation of energy, which does not prescribe how or where energy is distributed, but judges energy as a form.

Being is a form, and thus reality is, first and foremost, a substance of forms.

Plato’s doctrine of forms or ideas is hierarchical. The highest form is the Form of the Good. This is the fundamental idea that gives meaning to all other forms and is the source of all being and knowledge. Plato compares the Form of the Good with the sun.

Just as the sun provides the visible realm with light and makes objects visible, so the Idea of Goodness illuminates the world of ideas and makes it intelligible to the mind. As such, it is the foundation of all truth and goodness.

Because it underlies all reality, the Idea of Goodness cannot be created or destroyed.

This is comparable to the law of conservation of energy, the first law of thermodynamics. This law likewise states that energy cannot be created or destroyed. It is possible only to convert one form into another.

A fundamental logical principle also underlies this physical law: the structure of reality and of being is bound up with coherence and symmetry. In this connection, a reference to the mathematician Noether is appropriate.

This logical and symmetrical coherence can be compared to Plato's work in the Republic—the ideal education (value, the cave) [502–521]—in which he shows how reason, through logical and geometrical ordering of judgments, investigates reality. This in turn provides human beings with insight into truth and goodness, as illustrated in the allegory of the cave.

In short, within Plato's philosophy and in the laws of thermodynamics—especially the first law—there is a strong coherence between the fundamental principles of being.

2. Becoming – Increasing disorder within 'being' – the law of entropy

Before speaking about becoming, it is important to note that becoming can be described from different perspectives. Becoming can be explained phenomenologically, as we find for example in Parmenides. It can also be described from the perspective of emanation, referring to Plotinus.

2a. Phenomenological perspective

If the first law of thermodynamics explains the structure of thermodynamics, then within this structure diversity appears. This diversity manifests itself in a multiplicity that unfolds.

It is not easy to understand why, if the Idea of Goodness is the highest form, there should be a layering of forms. We attempt an explanation. The layers of reality arise because lower forms are reflections of the highest power (the Idea of Goodness), but they are not identical to that highest power. They are imperfections, participating in the Idea of Goodness, yet remaining incomplete.

Through the distinction between higher and lower forms, the reality as we know it differs from the Idea of Goodness. The sensory world, as people experience it daily, is a faint reflection of the original Idea of Goodness and is therefore of a lower order. This order is temporal and spatial.

Parmenides, a pre-Socratic philosopher, states that the unchanging One unfolds and reveals itself (Parmenides, Fragments in Diels–Kranz, DK 28B1–B8). The One participates in being. This participation explains the coherence between unity and multiplicity and the diffuse reality revealed to us. This position somewhat removes the force of change as an independent law from ontology. Changes are, first of all, phenomena that people perceive in certain ways, from different perspectives.

It is quite possible that Plato was influenced by Parmenides in how he grounds reality in ontology. Plato even includes Parmenides in one of his dialogues. By elevating the Idea of Goodness, he essentially raises the highest form to a metaphysical, unchanging principle. What people perceive as a changing reality is, from that principle, merely a faint reflection of this highest form. Plato further argues that what we perceive with the senses is a lower reality than what we can know through reason. Through reason, a person can come to know the higher forms, all the way to the highest form, the Idea of Goodness. But this is a difficult spiritual path and not accessible to everyone.

What Plato expresses to a lesser extent is the question of how the changes we observe develop over time. This matters because the strength we may derive from the Idea of

Goodness can be affected by the direction of change. If the so-called “faint reflections” continue to dissolve into further gradations and become increasingly independent from the original form, this may lead to difficulties (over time) in understanding the forms more fully.

And it is precisely here that the law of entropy indeed signals that the distance from unity increases in physical terms. Here, as announced in the introduction, philosophy is related to the physical laws of thermodynamics. Due to this increasing physical distance, the ability to know unity may fade, and “finding truth” becomes more complex as the “arrow of time” progresses. This is because the “arrow of time” in spatial terms points toward increasing disorder. Becoming is therefore not merely an independent development, but—if we are unaware of it—can hinder our spiritual ability to find the good and derive strength from it.

One might think that Parmenides’ view does not sufficiently align with physical laws (such as entropy). But that is debatable. After all, Einstein argues that observers in different states of motion experience time and space differently (depending on their frame of reference). In Parmenides, tension arises with the concept of entropy because he largely ignores the “arrow of time.” Einstein eases this tension because the “arrow of time” is acknowledged within the space-time framework (comparable to being).

In short: through the way we perceive, we experience diversity. Diversity is relative to viewpoint and position. In this approach, being is more or less the substrate - unchanging and static. There is no becoming; change is merely a local interpretation of being.

2b. The perspective of emanation

The Neoplatonist Plotinus, when speaking about the “arrow of time,” does more justice to the law of entropy. Like Plato, he thinks in analogy. He proposes a comparison between the One and the sun: “Just as the sun shines without willing it, so does everything flow from the One—not through will, but through abundance.” (Enneads V.2.1) There is a dynamism or power that proceeds from the One. “The One remains in itself, and yet it is present in all things; not because it divides itself, but because everything longs for the One and flows from the One.” (Enneads V.4.2) The One overflows into multiplicity without losing itself; this is emanation.

The overflowing of the One into multiplicity is a movement that can provide an explanation for the “arrow of time.” The arrow of time gives direction to becoming, which is thereby characterized as an irreversible process.

The arrow of time likewise applies to the law of entropy. It is plausible that entropy influences the way reality unfolds for us, and that through the influence of emanation we are able to remember the One. Indeed, Plotinus indicates that we even long for it. In Christian literature, referring to Augustine, this aligns with humanity’s longing for God.

We do not “remember” the future because information in the direction of increasing entropy is absent. We experience events as changes due to the direction of time. Our lives are also subject to this: birth, growth, aging, death. It is a local expression of the second law of thermodynamics.

If we follow Plotinus in claiming that the “arrow of time” is not a mere perceptual construct (as in Parmenides) but is fundamentally anchored in being, then the question arises: How does this influence our memory and experience of being - especially of being in its highest form?

3. Thinking about the end of things in the infinity of time

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion: there is more to be said in support of the perspective of Plotinus. Philosophy and physical laws reinforce one another here. Entropy, as a law, was of course unknown to the classical philosophers of Ancient Greece.

Through thermodynamic laws we can determine that energy becomes increasingly evenly distributed.

If we extend the “arrow of time” to its extreme, this leads to a condition in which all matter, at the atomic level, is equally distant from everything else. This means that no further change is possible. The temperature is –273 degrees Celsius; 0 Kelvin.

In an earlier article I described this condition as the mirror of the moon reflecting and receiving the rays of the highest form, the sun (as an analogy).

In short, this uniform distribution is the end of becoming, because cosmically it signifies a state of stasis. This is the face of stillness and emptiness, which cannot be related to paradise for us, because the distance from the origin - Idea of Goodness - is cosmically at its highest point. Is it an unconscious fear about this emptiness that drives human beings?

4. Impact of physical laws on human behavior from a philosophical perspective

A consequence of the direction of the “arrow of time” is the increase in disorder, which may drive us to obtain and reserve energy in every possible form. But in doing so we do not orient ourselves toward the Idea of Goodness, but toward the lack of it - the growing distance from God and paradise. We create an illusion and resist this trend.

I – Illusion

The highest form, from which strength can be drawn, is majestic and demands seeking, longing, and the knowing of truth. Earlier we noted that within being certain symmetrical patterns can be discerned. These patterns require a careful and balanced approach. Removing parts from symmetrical patterns leads to disturbance and thus imbalance. It is not impossible that through becoming, asymmetrical patterns arise. Actually, people actively contribute to this by excessively extracting energy and matter from the whole. The temptation to do this appears to be great. Man seek certainty and safety, but this is actually mere appearance. We maintain the illusion that we can escape the arrow of time. This temptation to possess and use excessive energy is also part of religious tradition, such as the temptation of humanity by evil and the archetype of Lucifer.

II – Resistance

Resistance to the “arrow of time,” which through entropy leads to a cold, dark emptiness, is understandable emotionally, but not rationally. If becoming tends toward the trend of uniform distribution, then this is simply a given of existence. Actually, man attempt to “escape the dance of dying” by freezing matter - from eggs to bodies and DNA - in order to be reanimated. We try with all our might to slow down or undo becoming, which we suspect removes us further from being, whether in the sense of the Idea of Goodness or the primordial form. The question is whether we should not instead accept that becoming tends toward uniform distribution, and learn to bear this distribution within a symmetrical context - together - rather than competing with one another, leading to a Pyrrhic victory.

Symmetry has far less direction in time, and is therefore reversible - in terms of potentiality, equal, and time-neutral. Emphasis on the conservation of energy expresses harmony - the possibility of transforming energy. By contrast, emphasis on asymmetry - appropriating and reserving energy, extracting it from the whole - places the focus on irreversibility, inequality, and the process of becoming. I need not argue what implications these perspectives have for questions concerning the structure of society and human behavior. Nevertheless, the resistance is understandable, because becoming saturates us with worry. That may be one reason Plato provided us with his philosophy: reason gives us the ability to focus not on emptiness and the world of shadows, but on the abundance of the Good.

Maintaining the illusion, the appearance, and persisting in resistance is perhaps a survival strategy - but also a “deadly embrace.” The fear of emptiness that we face when we do not strive for symmetry arises because we apparently believe that we have more to lose than to gain. Therefore we turn to the concept of the privatio theory.

5. Privatio theory

On the path of thought toward the Idea of Goodness - and being associated with it - we discover the structure and symmetry of life expressed therein. The dynamic of becoming and the direction of irreversibility is placed in a more nuanced perspective.

Human existence nevertheless remains undeniably frustrating and emotional, because we perceive and experience that being is not a heavenly condition but, due to becoming, changes irreversibly - and in a way we mostly interpret as decay. There is perhaps nothing as burdensome as bearing the loss of loved ones who have been taken from us by events. Existence is distinguished by loss and deficiency; stated extremely: "to be or not to be."

The lack of goodness within being is known as the *privatio* theory. In this connection Augustine stated: "Omnis natura bona est" - every nature is good. Through imperfections - lack of the good in nature, including human nature - there is corruption of the good.

For comparison: Plato holds that our existence is a faint reflection of the Idea of Goodness. Lack of knowledge of the world of forms obscures our view of the realm of truth and goodness. Plotinus introduces more dynamism by stating that separation from the One leads to a greater lack of goodness.

The religious tradition contains an analogous relationship with the thought of Plato. And as important conclusion, by contemplating on being instead of focussing merely on becoming, we embrace potency, symmetry and majesty of creation.

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