



Research Paper

## Is reality an illusion? - the philosophical insight of Being, Becoming and Non-being

Dr. Jadumoni Dutta

Associate Professor

Dept. of Philosophy, S.M.D.College, Charing, Sivasagar

---

**Abstract-**

Being simply means the state of existence, non-being is the state of non-existence and becoming means the state of momentariness of both being and non-being. All these three standpoints are closely associated with reality. Ancient Indian and Greek philosophers have showed their wider interest to interpret the existence of the world in three chief dimensions of being, non-being and becoming. Which one is reality or can we consider reality itself is an illusion? Is there is no reality only actuality? There was sharp argumentation among the philosophers to establish their own viewpoints from different prospects. The paper tried to highlight the dilemma of these three primordial concepts as evolved in philosophical discourses in ancient Indian and Greek philosophy.

**Keywords** – being, becoming, non-being, reality.

Received 12 May., 2026; Revised 25 May., 2026; Accepted 28 May., 2026 © The author(s) 2026.

Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

### I. Introduction-

The crux is all about of the state of 'is' and 'is-not'. It opens many philosophical debates on appearance and reality, permanence and change, one and many, truth and falsity and even up to reality and language in postmodern period. The state of 'is' can be compared with the verb 'to be' and the state of 'is-not' can be compared with 'not to be'. The concept of 'being' means simply 'is', existent and whatever 'is', it is permanent in nature. Thus, being is one and it discard the reality of many-ness. Some thinkers advocated that only being is existent and it also indicates that from one being the whole things of the world evolved and further the world is the manifestation of that one 'being'. The monists have the conviction that there is one reality. Those who believe in one Absolute hold that 'being' is one, static and unchangeable forever. Being has no beginning and end. More simply in philosophy it is called as the Absolute. The theory of modern science which consider that time does not flow and support the 'block Universe' is likely in support the theory of one 'being'. Thus, the theory of being in its existential nature find prominent place in philosophical thinking specially for the determinists. On the other hand, those who believe on the principle that time flows in modern science prefers the theory of 'becoming'. This theory consider that change is real, not an illusion as hold by the advocates of 'being'. The history of the biological evolution is the evidence for the dynamic nature of 'becoming' since the origin of the species up to its present evolution stage. There is another front that believes that non-being is real. It is the denial of all 'being' or the stage of existence. This philosophy reveals that nothing at all – the existence of all things lost in oblivion so nothing is permanent in this cosmos. It inspired Gorgias, the master of skepticism to utter that even 'knowledge is impossible'. Thus, non-being indicates the non-existence, void, nothingness and absence of things. So, it is a matter of prime philosophical importance to make a survey on reality to determine which one is real – being, non-being and becoming.

**Objectives-** the objective of this paper is to make a survey and to find out a suitable explanation of the concept of reality through three prevalent theories of being, non-being and becoming.

**Methodology-** the method used in this paper is descriptive and analytic. Data are collected from secondary sources, i.e.,; reference books and other relevant e-resources.

## II. Discussion-

As the philosophical insight grew up in the development of the thought process in two major geographical areas in the world, philosophers had tried to find out the basic stuff of the universe in different dimensions. The main purpose was to reveal and discover the hidden truth out of which the world is constituted to give a proper explanation of the outer world. The demand is to show the reason behind the creation and manifestation of this world so that proper explanation of the existence of different creatures can be interpreted. It is also for the sake of gathering knowledge, the propensity to use this knowledge for better understanding and realization of this creation. In order to find out the true nature of things, the philosophical concept of being, non-being and becoming strike the philosophers in the gradual development of philosophical discourses.

There are sharp argumentation and debates on the nature of reality as propounded by the ancient Indian and Greek thinkers. Many thinkers prefer that only being or the state of existent can be considered, there is no place of non-being and becoming in this cosmos. Some thinkers believed that like 'being', the existence of the state of 'non-being' cannot be denied, so both are equally present. The advocates of the theory of 'becoming' consider this world as continuous flux and therefore they consider 'becoming' as the only reality, not 'being' nor 'non-being'. Being and non-being is the two stages of the principle of 'becoming'.

## III. On Being-

The Upanisadic philosopher Uddālaka Āruṇi (the first natural scientific philosopher) also offered his view on reality. He pointed out that it is quite unpractical to say that being proceeds out of non-being as an effect. It is an inconceivable notion. He argued that non-being cannot be the cause of being. Nor we can say that 'being' is the cause of being just like 'A is the cause of A', which is nothing but a tautological expression. So, non-being is not the cause of being. Then what is the cause of being? As logically being is not the product of non-being, neither being is the cause of being. So being as a reality has no cause, a causeless being. Being is causeless existence according to Āruṇi. As something cannot come out of nothing (non-being). Thus, Uddālaka came to the conclusion that only being exist, non-being never exist. *Ekam Evadvitiam* - means that being is non-dual being.

Xenophanes, the founder of Eleatic school of thought was the first who asserted that 'All is one'. It leads to grow the philosophical concept of the Absolute in ancient Greek philosophy. Parmenides follows Xenophanes holds that only 'being' exists and being is the sole reality. Parmenides used the existential sense of the verb 'to be' as 'being' out of its use in different ways later exposed by Aristotle. Being is the first principle of things. There is no place of 'is not' in Parmenides philosophy. Even the combination of 'is' and 'is not' is not allowed. According to him all knowledge must be of 'What is'. Parmenides thesis is - 'Ex nihilo nihil fit' (nothing is coming out of nothing). That nothing cannot be the cause of anything. His philosophy is the absolute affirmation of 'is'. Thus, there is no room for any change and mutation of whatever 'is'. Reality is unchanging forever. Reality is one as Parmenides claims that 'All is one'. Parmenides draws an interesting distinction in between sense and reason that helps to understand the insight of 'being' and 'non-being'. In this world of continuous shifting, change and mutation of the things nothing is looks like permanent. Everything has its origin, growth, decay and lost in oblivion. It is the world of our sense that holds this falsity of the appearance of things that this continuous flux is considered as real for us. But this is not true according to Parmenides. This is not reality, an apparency that mistakenly holds as real. Parmenides thus holds that the sense as faculty is the source of all our errors and illusion and therefore the confusion creates where the change is considered as real. Parmenides pointed out that 'being' is neither created nor destroyed. What 'is' is always exist, necessarily exist. 'Being' is not generable and indestructible. Parmenides draw the sharp dichotomy between 'is' and 'is-not'. His point is that what 'is-not' is neither said nor can be thought.

Plato differs from Parmenides. He never thought that non-being cannot be unspeakable and offered an advance form of the theory of being. Plato in his 'theory of ideas' considered that 'ideas' being the absolute reality. The material things that are found in the sense are the copies or imitations of the ideas. Plato consider the Absolute as many in one. The abstract unity cannot be thinkable without the presence of many. Thus, if we consider that 'one is being' it means being cannot totally exclude from the non-being as one cannot be separated from the many. The co-relation of one and many indicates the non-being in being just like being of light is the non-being of darkness. Plato's point is that all being has its non-being in it.

### **Non-being -**

The Greek atomists believe that non-being exists like the being. The empty space and void exist. The void is conceived as what is-not, in which there is nothing at all. It indicates the presence of empty space without which the motion is not possible. As motion exist, so undoubtedly void exist. The atomists repudiate Parmenides claim that the void is what-is -not is neither real nor the object of thought. The atomists also reject the theory of no motion and no void as advocated by Zeno and Milissus supporting Parmenides. The atomists also reject Aristotle claim that the void exists outside the cosmos. The nihilists views also support the atomists. The atomists argues that if there is no void, the movement is from what-is to what is already full where two bodies will occupy the same space, which is not possible. The contraction and expansion of the material bodies also need void or empty space as well as growth demands the necessity of voidness. So, Non-being or voidness exists in the cosmos.

The Indian Vaiśeṣika philosophers also consider non-being or non-existence as one of the categories. Non-being is equally true as being in this world. This school divides non-existence as prior non-existence, posterior non-existence, absolute non-existence and mutual non-existence. A jar is a prior non-existence is clay, this prior non-existence is destroyed when the jar is produced. Posterior non-existence is like the destruction of the jar by an efficient cause. They pointed out that the non-existence of cow in horse or horse in a cow is mutual non-existence. Absolute non-existence is the absolute negation in all times and places. Thus, the Vaiśeṣikas considered non-being or non-existence as key component of the nature of reality as without the presence of non-existence, all things will be eternal and everlasting.

### **Becoming –**

In between the contrast of 'being' and 'non-being' there prevails another phenomenological view which is known as the theory of 'becoming'. This view neither ascertain the theory of 'being' nor 'non-being'. The Mādhyamika Buddhists and Heraclitus of Greek adopted the theory of becoming. Heraclitus view is direct antithesis of Eleatic school of thought. He refuted the concept of being and consider that it is not the permanence but the 'change' is the ultimate reality. For Heraclitus only becoming is, there is no static being. Being is an illusion. There is nothing in this phenomenal world that never goes on the path of change, the reality is that the world is ever evolving in each and every moment. Heraclitus affirms 'Into the same rivers we step and do not step, we are and we are not'- there is no absolute permanence in this world. Nothing remains identical from one consecutive moment to another. Heraclitus declared that 'All is flux'. Heraclitus even reject the temporary permanence of the things of the world.

Things stands in between 'is' and 'is not'. Therefore, things stand the state of 'becoming' rather than the state of 'being' and 'non-being'. Nothing remains same as one moment things 'are' and in the next moment things 'are not'. Even at the same time things stands for 'is' and 'is not' and that at once ness is the 'becoming' for Heraclitus. So, becoming alone is the reality, not the being and the non-being. Becoming is the identity of both being and not-being. So, the doctrine that holds that being and not-being are both equally real is known as the theory of becoming in true sense. A person from the birth to death is obviously the same person but each and every moment of life it passes through a process of origination, growth and decay. So, in each and every moment the person is a new person and bear the possibility of continuous change in life. Becoming is the passing of being into not-being. Everything of the world bears the dual state of being and not-being at the same time, nothing is excluded from it. The point is that being itself bears not-being in it, later agreed by Plato. The doctrine of oppositeness of things also supports the state of becoming.

Nāgārjuna, the Buddhist scholar choice the middle path in between existence(being) and non-existence(non-being). He used the word *Śūnyatā* to denote the relative and absolute reality. The claim is that the relative is the way to the Absolute, which cannot be grasp without the help of the relative. The relative is unreal, an illusion, yet it has some reality. All relative and contingent phenomena become extinct in the Absolute. It is a stage in between 'is' and 'is-not', neither existent nor non-existent. So, it prefers the theory of 'becoming'.

## **IV. Conclusion-**

Out of the three theories propounded by the ancient Indian and Greek thinkers that reflects the concept of reality it can be said that being, non-being and becoming are the three stages of reality. No one is truer and less important than other. There is no doubt that being as 'what is' is existent in this world as things, non-being as 'what is-not' also certainly associated with the things and becoming as 'what is and is-not' represent the dual aspect of existent and nonexistent nature of things at the same moment. Both 'being' and 'non-being' are one sided dogmatic theory. Thus, 'Becoming' as a theory of reality is more comprehensive one as it covers and reconcile in between 'being' and 'non -being'. If we have to know the nature of reality of this world and our relation to the things of the world all these three theories definitely help us to build a world view about reality.

**References**

- [1]. Tanka Vijay: Ancient Greek Philosophy, Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi ,India, 2014.
- [2]. Stace.W.T.: A Critical History of Greek Philosophy, Macmillan India Limited, Delhi, 1920.
- [3]. Krishnanada Swami: Chhandogya Upanisad, The Divine Life Society, Uttarakhand, India, 1984.
- [4]. Sinha Jadunath : Outlines of Indian Philosophy, New Central Book Agency (P) Ltd, Kolkata, 1985.