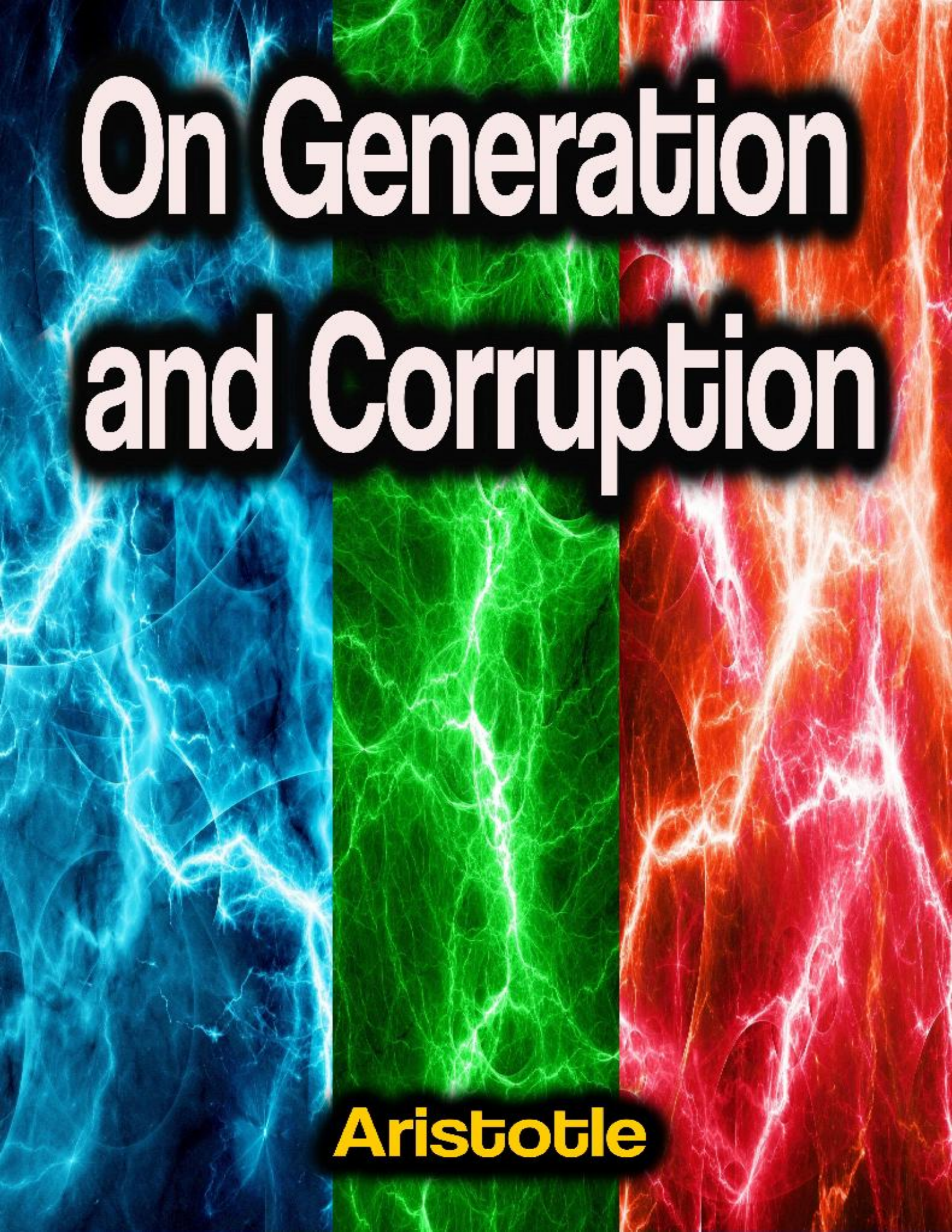
On Generation
and Corruption
Aristotle

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Book 1

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OUR next task is to study coming-to-be and passing-away. We are to distinguish the causes, and to state the definitions, of these processes considered in general-as changes predicable uniformly of all the things that come-to-be and pass-away by nature. Further, we are to study growth and 'alteration'. We must inquire what each of them is; and whether 'alteration' is to be identified with coming-to-be, or whether to these different names there correspond two separate processes with distinct natures.

On this question, indeed, the early philosophers are divided. Some of them assert that the so-called 'unqualified coming-to-be' is 'alteration', while others maintain that 'alteration' and coming-to-be are distinct. For those who say that the universe is one something (i.e. those who generate all things out of one thing) are bound to assert that coming-to-be is 'alteration', and that whatever 'comes-to-be' in the proper sense of the term is 'being altered': but those who make the matter of things more than one must distinguish coming-to-be from 'alteration'. To this latter class belong Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Leucippus. And yet Anaxagoras himself failed to understand his own utterance. He says, at all events, that coming-to-be and passing-away are the same as 'being altered':' yet, in common with other thinkers, he affirms that the elements are many. Thus Empedocles holds that the corporeal elements are four, while all the elements-including those which initiate movement-are six in number; whereas Anaxagoras agrees with Leucippus and Democritus that the elements are infinite.

(Anaxagoras posits as elements the 'homoeomeries', viz. bone, flesh, marrow, and everything else which is such that part and whole are the same in name and nature; while Democritus and Leucippus say that there are indivisible bodies, infinite both in number and in the varieties of their shapes, of which everything else is composed-the compounds differing one from another according to the shapes, 'positions', and 'groupings' of their constituents.)

For the views of the school of Anaxagoras seem diametrically opposed to those of the followers of Empedocles. Empedocles says that Fire, Water, Air, and Earth are four elements, and are thus 'simple' rather than flesh, bone, and bodies which, like these, are 'homoeomeries'. But the followers of Anaxagoras regard the 'homoeomeries' as 'simple' and elements, whilst they affirm that Earth, Fire, Water, and Air are composite; for each of these is (according to them) a 'common seminary' of all the 'homoeomeries'.

Those, then, who construct all things out of a single element, must maintain that coming-to-be and passing-away are 'alteration'. For they

must affirm that the underlying something always remains identical and one; and change of such a substratum is what we call ‘altering’ Those, on the other hand, who make the ultimate kinds of things more than one, must maintain that ‘alteration’ is distinct from coming-to-be: for coming-to-be and passing-away result from the consilience and the dissolution of the many kinds. That is why Empedocles too uses language to this effect, when he says ‘There is no coming-to-be of anything, but only a mingling and a divorce of what has been mingled’. Thus it is clear (i) that to describe coming-to-be and passing-away in these terms is in accordance with their fundamental assumption, and (ii) that they do in fact so describe them: nevertheless, they too must recognize ‘alteration’ as a fact distinct from coming to-be, though it is impossible for them to do so consistently with what they say.
That we are right in this criticism is easy to perceive. For ‘alteration’ is a fact of observation. While the substance of the thing remains unchanged, we see it ‘altering’ just as we see in it the changes of magnitude called ‘growth’ and ‘diminution’. Nevertheless, the statements of those who posit more ‘original reals’ than one make ‘alteration’ impossible. For ‘alteration, as we assert, takes place in respect to certain qualities: and these qualities (I mean, e.g. hot-cold, white-black, dry-moist, soft-hard, and so forth) are, all of them, differences characterizing the ‘elements’. The actual words of Empedocles may be quoted in illustration
The sun everywhere bright to see, and hot,
The rain everywhere dark and cold;

and he distinctively characterizes his remaining elements in a similar manner. Since, therefore, it is not possible for Fire to become Water, or Water to become Earth, neither will it be possible for anything white to become black, or anything soft to become hard; and the same argument applies to all the other qualities. Yet this is what ‘alteration’ essentially is.
It follows, as an obvious corollary, that a single matter must always be assumed as underlying the contrary ‘poles’ of any change whether change of place, or growth and diminution, or ‘alteration’; further, that the being of this matter and the being of ‘alteration’ stand and fall together. For if the change is ‘alteration’, then the substratum is a single element; i.e. all things which admit of change into one another have a single matter. And, conversely, if the substratum of the changing things is one, there is ‘alteration’.
Empedocles, indeed, seems to contradict his own statements as well as the observed facts. For he denies that any one of his elements comes-to-be out of any other, insisting on the contrary that they are the things out of which everything else comes-to-be; and yet (having brought the entirety of existing things, except Strife, together into one) he