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Tomáš Drvota
Studien zu Parmenides

Tomáš Drvota's doctoral dissertation called 'Studien zu Parmenides' consists of three chapters. The first chapter deals with the interpretation of an inscription found in Velia containing the name Parmeneides. The second chapter discusses the Proem of Parmenides' poem, whereas the third chapter offers a reconstruction of the main outlines of the cosmology expounded in the third part of Parmenides' poem. The last two chapters are more closely connected in so far as they try to offer a unified interpretation of the Proem and the cosmology of the third part of the poem, while the first chapter forms a unity on its own.

The dissertation is, on the whole, of high academic and philological standards and offers some new insights that are valuable contributions to long-standing scholarly debates. Drvota's meticulous method makes the systematic discussion of complex problems easier to follow. The arguments are for the most part clearly formulated. Drvota displays an impressive familiarity with (especially the older) secondary literature, and his critical assessments of rival theories and interpretations are, generally speaking, well-balanced and judicious. The text makes a good read and, as far as I can judge, is very well written (with a manageable number of typos and mistakes). I found it important to start my report with this overall positive evaluation because, while for the most part I tend to agree with Drvota's critique of rival hypotheses, I often find myself in disagreement with his individual positive suggestions. But in the case of such dauntingly difficult problems, one can disagree with the interpretations and yet appreciate the skill and acumen with which they have been formulated.

The general structure of the dissertation seems somewhat problematic. It is true that the title *Studien zu Parmenides* does not promise an overall interpretation of Parmenides' poem. Yet if a dissertation consists of three parts two of which discusses two parts of a poem that has three parts, the lack of a discussion of the third part of the same poem becomes very conspicuous. This is especially so when the missing part is the central part. If the reason for not discussing the main part of the goddess' speech was merely the limitation of space (as I understand Drvota explains in his Czech preface), then it might have been a better overall strategy to leave out the first, independent chapter and offer at least some discussion of the central part of the poem.

The first chapter is primarily critical. Its main objective is to discard some recent hypotheses prompted by the inscription on an akephalos herm, found in a group of four similar herms with inscriptions in the agora of Velia. Drvota first discusses the word *Οὐλιάδης*. He shows, to my mind entirely convincingly, that the theory according to which there was a cult of the healing god Apollo *Οὔλιος* in Velia and that its priests, among whom Parmenides, practiced temple medicine, stands on extremely shaky grounds and involves a series of imaginative steps. Next comes a discussion of the enigmatic word *φώλαρχος* found together with the word *ιατρός* on the other three inscriptions, but not on the one bearing the name Parmenides. After a criticism of different hypotheses connecting the word with Apollo and incubational temple medicine, Drvota finally suggests that the word simply refers to a teacher or someone connected with a school.

Although I wholeheartedly agree with Drvota's sober refusal to build fanciful hypotheses about Parmenides' religious outlook and social status on the basis of this inscription, I find Drvota's final position hypercritical. After his minimal conclusion about *φώλαρχος* (so that it refers to a teacher or someone connected with a school) I think it is overcritical to refuse to connect the two adjacent words *ιατρός φώλαρχος* and to accept that the three men belonged to a medical school. To my mind, the presence of these herms with uniform inscriptions, clearly forming a group, is an indication of an attempt to show that these doctors were not merely three independent individual practitioners. Moreover, even though I admit that it cannot be *proven beyond doubt* that the *Παρμενείδης Πύρητος Οὐλιάδης φυσικός* in Velia is meant to be the Presocratic philosopher Parmenides of Elea, son of *Πύρης*, I find this identification hard to resist. Furthermore, I do not think there is any harm in connecting it with the herms of the three doctors. Even though it admittedly remains a hypothesis, I find it entirely conceivable that the people who sometimes in the first century CE wanted to celebrate the presence of a school of doctors in the town also wanted to place it under the authority and prestige of the famous philosopher of the same town. The inscription after all does not want to make Parmenides a doctor, as it clearly says that he was a *φυσικόν*. Yet a school of doctors could nevertheless refer to Parmenides' physiological, embryological teachings, of which we have only a little bit, to boast the prestige of their own school. Such a reconstruction would tell us nothing new or striking about Parmenides himself, about his relation to religious cult, local or otherwise, or healing practices, incubation or otherwise, but would indicate that centuries after his death Parmenides was still a respected figure in his town and that doctors of the town might wanted to benefit from his prestige. Be that as it may, I think Drvota's critical discussion is an extremely helpful corrective to some recent hypotheses.

The second chapter of the dissertation discusses the Proem of Parmenides' Poem. Its central thesis is that the journey described in the Proem is fundamentally eschatological, yet not a *katabasis*, as Morrison, Mansfeld, Burkert and others have maintained, but an *anabasis*, that is a journey into the sky. Let me first state that before reading the dissertation I was inclined to accept the *katabasis* theory, but Drvota's critical and positive arguments convinced me that the *anabasis* interpretation is much more likely. The detailed discussion contains many fine observations and remarks on the interpretation of individual words and expressions. An interesting original suggestion is to understand the expression *εἰδότα φῶτα* to refer to the sun and the moon. With characteristic skepsis, Drvota refuses to accept any of the solutions how to read the problematic words *πανταυτη* vel. *sim.* in the same line. It seems to me however that his suggestion concerning *εἰδότα φῶτα* could receive support from the reading *kata*; *πάντ' ἄσπη*, which is anyhow the preferred reading of most current editors. For if it is a problem why should the journey of the poet lead 'over all cities', it makes excellent sense to say that the path of the sun and the moon leads 'over all cities'.

Drvota suggests furthermore that this *ὁδός*, common to sun and moon are not the daily paths of them, but rather their annual paths along the zodiac. Moreover, this road is at the same time the road on which souls are lead from this world to the gate of the Otherworld which is probably at the autumnal solstice point on the zodiac. The problem is that by the end it becomes unclear how to picture this *ὁδός*. One difficulty is that on Drvota's own interpretation of the *stephanai* of the cosmology, the respective *stephanai* of sun and moon are far removed from one another, the fixed stars being between the two. Now what would the common *ὁδός* of the sun and the moon along the zodiac be in such a case? Is it merely a path *projected* on the zodiac by the annual motions of sun and moon as they revolve in different layers of the world? I doubt if the expression *ὁδός ... ἢ ... φέρει εἰδότα φῶτα* could carry the weight of such a complicated image. And how can the sun, moving in a different sphere, pass through a gate which is located in the sphere of the fixed stars, at the entrance of the Milky Way? Moreover, given that such a road is circular it remains problematic how it could be the road on which souls are lead from the earthly realm to the sphere of the fixed stars, i.e. how to introduce the vertical aspect from earth to sky into the circular path along the zodiac. These questions are no mere quibbles in view of the fact that Drvota's central project is to create links between the Proem and the detailed cosmological account.

In the third and final chapter Drvota attempts to offer a coherent interpretation of Parmenides' cosmological fragments and show in what ways this cosmology is connected to the image of the journey in the Proem. Once again, Drvota shows his philological acumen in dealing with the primary evidence and the array of rival interpretations on offer. Before turning to the assessment of some details, let me first state my major point of criticism. In speaking about the cosmological account in Parmenides' poem there are two standard interpretative problems: one concerns the reconstruction of this cosmology, while the other concerns its epistemological status. Drvota concentrates on the first, and pays hardly any attention to the second. As is common knowledge, the cosmology belongs to the second part of the goddess' speech with which the goddess shows no cognitive identification, but prefaces it with negative epistemological terms (B1.28-32; B8.50). This of course has prompted an important debate about the status and motivations of the cosmological account. Drvota, however, seems to assume throughout that the cosmological account is a valid

description of the physical world for Parmenides. It is a possible view but is certainly in need of argumentative support that I cannot find in the dissertation. Once again, the few sentences Drvota spends on the relationship between the cosmological account and the Aletheia towards the end of the chapter only make it more apparent how important it would be to provide a more elaborate discussion of this vexed question.

One specific aspect of this problem is related to Drvota's claim that the unnamed goddess of the Proem, with her eschatological functions, is identical with 'the *daimon* who steers all things' in B12. I find this identification not without appeal, yet I think Drvota should have discussed some possibly serious objections. One is that it may seem somewhat queer that the goddess speaks about herself in the third person in an objectified way. Furthermore, in view of what she takes to be the truth about the world as described in the first part of her speech, it is unclear why she should fulfil the role ascribed to the *daimon* of B12 in dealing with generation described in negative terms (generation being denied in the first part of her speech) on the basis of gender distinctions (distinctions being also denied in the first part of her speech). Besides, in so far as the cosmology is part of the 'beliefs of mortal men', it is unclear whether, according to the goddess of the Proem, *there is* such a steering *daimon* or whether the *daimon* is simply part of the fantasy world of mortals. All these, and many further, questions may very well receive an answer compatible with Drvota's overall interpretation, but would nevertheless need a more serious discussion based on a more explicit interpretation about the status and motivation of the second part of the goddess' speech.

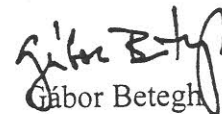
My other main critical remark concerns Drvota's attitude towards Parmenides' role in the development of mathematical astronomy. He repeatedly states that the cosmological account given by Parmenides is archaic and tries to downplay the innovations customarily attributed to Parmenides. One example of this approach is his treatment of the view that the moon's light is reflected. He uncritically quotes testimonies that, I think quite improbably, ascribe this view already to Thales and ignores the discussions and conclusions of two important recent publications precisely on this question (D. Graham and D. Panchenko). While I once again agree with Drvota that the cosmological account presented by the goddess is deeply connected to and influenced by religious ideas, I find that it is no reason to deny a scientific interest from Parmenides. And certainly no reason not to discuss the relevant results of historians of science.

A connected but independent point concerns Drvota's treatment of *stephanai*, where once again the religious outlook gets contrasted with the scientific. Drvota rightly emphasizes the religious connotations of the word *stephane*. On the other hand, he forcefully argues that it is a mistake to think that Parmenides speaks about spheres. One—although not the only—reason he adduces is that such a view would be 'the product of a mathematical-geometrical worldview, alien to the archaic Eleatic thinking'. In a footnote he even apologizes for not having completely cleansed his text from the sphere language. Yet, I think, it is no mere effect of negligence that he sometimes keeps speaking about spheres. In so far as the earth for Parmenides is spherical, and assumedly also the air around it, we have to conclude that the innermost *stephanai* cannot be simply flat rings. The solid wall around the cosmos is also a

sphere and not a ring,¹ and I can hardly imagine that the aither would only be a stripe and not a full sphere. The same goes, even more obviously, for the *stephane* of the fixed stars. So, on the whole, even if I think Drvota is entirely justified in calling attention to the religious overtones of Parmenides' choice of word, it does not need to imply that the word cannot at the same time express a more geometrically oriented view of the cosmos. It seems to me that the assumed contrast between 'religion' and 'science' is an unwelcome side effect of Drvota's thorough knowledge of and respect for the literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Let me finally repeat that all these disagreements and criticism notwithstanding I find that Drvota's work is a remarkable piece of scholarship of high international level. I have learnt a great deal out of it and I hope to see it published either in parts or, after some revision and enlargement, as a book. Without any doubt, the dissertation merits the award of the Ph.D.

Budapest, 29 July, 2006.


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¹ It seems to me that Drvota's insistence that the outside wall is not part of the cosmic system is unwarranted. According to B8 and B9 mortals describe *everything* in terms of the two principles, and that must apply also to the wall. It is clear, on the other hand, that this view creates a complication for the otherwise neat ordering that ranges the heavy, dense, hard and solid in the middle and the rare, light etc. at the periphery.