Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy by John Palmer (review)

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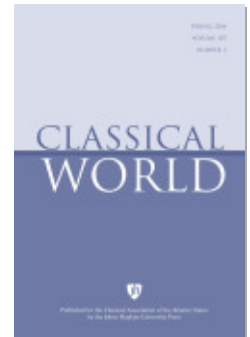
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is to be done or avoided, and with it the rational motivation dependent on that information. Practical reasoning also draws on evaluative *phantasia*, just as wish (βούλησις) does. Wishes are for things as ends, and the ends are determined by our non-rational character since the discernment (κρίσις) due to virtue is in line with the command of practical reason, but not a function of it.

Thus it is *phantasia*, not reason, which furnishes us with a view of the end. *Phantasia* is linked to habituation, too, which is considered the practical analogue of induction. Repeated perceptions of virtuous activities do not on their own provide the grasp of virtuous activity as a goal. One must preserve one's pleasurable perceptions in memory and reproduce them as representing something to be pursued. It leads to the Practical Empiricism thesis according to which the relation of perception to higher cognitive activities such as *phantasia* and thinking entails that appearances and thoughts of the good must derive from perceptions of it.

One might raise two small queries. It is far from clear that hatred is based on evaluative *phantasia* since, unlike anger, it seems to be grounded on judgment (*Rhet*. 2.4, 1382a4). This may invite the question as to what extent Aristotle has a unified account of emotions besides what he says in *Rhet*. 2.1, 1378a19–23, which does not mention *phantasia* or belief. Furthermore, if virtue of character is non-rational (163–74), how shall we interpret the function argument which connects human goodness to the excellent exercise of reason, the capacity which separates us from the rest of the animal realm?

The book offers important new insights, which makes it a welcome addition to the rapidly growing literature on Aristotle's practical philosophy. It is furnished with a good bibliography and two indices.

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John Palmer. *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xii, 428. $99.00. ISBN 978–0–19–956790–4.

Palmer's book presents a modal interpretation of Parmenides' poem: Parmenides is allegedly the first philosopher to distinguish systematically between the necessary, the impossible, and the contingent. Parmenides' What Is (τὸ ἐόν) should be understood as necessary being, while the realm of mortal opinions deals with contingent being. Palmer connects this interpretation with the claim that Parmenides was not the major turning point in the history of Presocratic philosophy, but should rather be seen in continuity with his successors and predecessors: Parmenides' What Is thus has its analogue in the divine principles of the early Greek philosophers, while light and night as the two basic principles of Parmenides' cosmology correspond to the material principles of other Presocratic cosmologies.

The first chapter canvasses the different narratives of Parmenides' place in Presocratic philosophy and points out some problems with the standard interpretations. Chapters 2–4 then develop Palmer's modal interpretation, while chapters 5–7 discuss Parmenides' connection with some of his immediate predecessors. The final chapter situates Parmenides within Presocratic philosophy

as a whole. The useful appendix, finally, contains the Greek text of the poem, as well as Palmer's translation and textual notes.

The idea that Parmenides' Being has to be understood as a necessary being is not new, and indeed we find some modal claims explicitly in the text. Palmer, however, is the first to make modality the main point of interpreting Parmenides' poem. This is indeed the big strength of the book, for it allows us to see how far we can get with a modal understanding of the poem. This interpretation does not need to make the realm of *doxa* a realm of mere illusion; it is simply what is contingently, and it presents no problem for there being a cosmology in the second part of Parmenides' poem. There are, however, at least four problems with Palmer's modal interpretation:

(1) It is not sufficiently clear what we should understand by the different modalities. Take necessity, for example. Parmenides' What Is is a necessary being, and by this Palmer understands a mode of being, rather than a logical property. But, as Palmer himself points out and as fragments 1 and 10 make clear, Parmenides claims some form of necessity also for the realm of *doxa*, the alleged realm of contingent being. All Palmer tells us about this modal complexity is that the necessity of What Is is a metaphysical or logical necessity, the necessity in the mortal realm a natural one; but there is no discussion of how natural necessity is connected with (presumably metaphysical) contingency. Furthermore, fragment 2 claims Being to be necessary, while fragment 6 claims that it is necessary *to say and think* that Being is. These are two different forms of necessity yet again, one to do with the existence of Being and the other with our thinking and saying. But Palmer does not tell us anything about how to understand the relation of the two.

(2) Palmer tries to develop a new understanding of "is" out of fragment 2 so that every instance of *estin* in the *alêtheia* part indicates necessary being, which at times seems to be somewhat of a stretch.

(3) Palmer simply assumes that this modal account is the very starting point of Parmenides. He does not even consider the possibility that it may instead be the result of other assumptions, like the result of Parmenides' understanding of the logical tools available and of what counts as a rigorous investigation.

(4) Finally, Palmer sees this ontological distinction—what must be, what cannot be, and what is but need not be—connected with distinct forms of cognition in such a way that, not very convincingly, all of Plato's distinctions in *Republic* V are already available.

Palmer's second big hypothesis—that Parmenides is basically in continuity with Presocratic philosophy as a whole—fights Guthrie's narrative that Parmenides is the watershed in the development of Presocratic philosophy. It follows a recent trend, but makes this claim more encompassing: not only are Parmenides' successors Anaxagoras and Empedocles in line with him, but also his predecessors such as Xenophanes and the Milesians. Thus Parmenides becomes, amazingly, a good Milesian, although it is hard to see how such a Milesian Parmenides can at the same time be the Plato of *Republic* V.

For Palmer this continuity does not, interestingly, extend to the usual Eleatic club members—Zeno and Melissus, whom Palmer separates much more from Parmenides than is usually done. This separation comes at the cost of having Melissus lack any philosophical potential. And without much discussion of his paradoxes, Zeno is claimed to give a quantitative and mathematical account of the world, in contrast to Parmenides' qualitative one. Allegedly this can be seen

in their respective understanding of continuity, but a look at Themistius' report shows that for what is ἀκριβῶς one, Zeno's notion of continuity is just the same as Parmenides'.

The chapter on Zeno and Melissus thus makes particularly obvious a general problem with this book: it is often rather dogmatic. Palmer certainly employs a laudable principle of charity when claiming to avoid ascribing crazy assumptions to ancient thinkers, if possible. Unfortunately, it is unclear who decides what counts as crazy. Thus Palmer declares that we have to avoid the "absurd" and "perverse" position of strict monism. Few of us may be monists, but is it clear that this is an "absurd position" in the history of philosophy? Spinoza and some contemporary metaphysicians may claim otherwise.

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Jan Kwapisz, David Petrain and Mikołaj Szymański (eds.). *The Muse at Play: Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry*. Beiträge zur Altertumskunde. Band 305. Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2013. Pp. 420. €109.95. ISBN 978–3–11–027000–6

Although riddles play a very significant role in Greek and Latin literatures, as in the myth of Oedipus and the Sphinx, this interesting topic has never received the attention it deserved. The proceedings of this Polish conference, held in May 2011 by the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of Warsaw, are therefore a very welcome publication. Organized by Jan Kwapisz, a professor of classical philology who has recently published an edition and commentary of the six *technopaegnia* preserved in the fifteenth book of the *Palatine Anthology* (*The Greek Figure Poems*, Leuven 2013), together with David Petrain (Vanderbilt University) and Mikołay Szymański (University of Warsaw), this conference has brought together a large group of scholars whose papers have been divided into five different sections.

The task of introducing the twenty papers has been entrusted to Joshua Katz, the author of an excellent study on the Indo-European background of the riddle of the Sphinx. The three papers of the first section ("Discourses of Play") deal with the enigmatic allusions we find in symposiastic poetry (E. Bowie: "The Sympotic Tease"); with the allusive language of dithyrambic poetry (P. A. LeVen: "'You Make Less Sense Than a (New) Dithyramb': Sociology of a Riddling Style"); and the linguistic wordplays carved on the Pompeian walls (R. R. Benefiel: "Magic Squares, Alphabet Jumbles, Riddles and More: The Culture of Word-games Among the Graffiti of Pompeii").

The second section ("The Ancient Riddle: Theory and Practice"), the very heart of the volume, starts with a paper on the riddles of the fourteenth book of the Greek Anthology, where Christine Luz (the author of *Technopaegnia. Formspiele in der griechichen Dichtung,* Leiden 2010) divides the poems into four main categories according to the different devices (metonymy/analogy, pun/double meaning, paradox, myth) used by their authors to disguise the solutions ("What Has It Got in Its Pocketses[sic]? Or, What Makes a Riddle a Riddle?").