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PARMENIDES. Some Comments on his Poem. WILLEM JACOB VERDENIUS. Translated by A. FONTEIN. Groningen,–Batavia, Bij J. B. Wolters' Uitgevers-Maatschappij N. V., 1942. Pp. iv, 88.

This doctoral dissertation, delayed in its appearance by the war, is a perfect little gem of scholarship—well, if not strictly perfect, it is none the less a gem. The main problem of the author is to work out a satisfactory explanation of the puzzling, second part of Parmenides poem. "No one can read this part of Parmenides' work with unbiased mind without being struck by its sincere and apodeictical tone . . . This is also borne out by the fact that he *has* to learn all that is stated by the goddess . . . She once more emphasizes his duty to learn . . . Antiquity generally regarded this part of the poem as Parmenides' own theory" (48).

The author's method naturally includes a criticism of the views of his predecessors. Their errors have ordinarily sprung from hasty assumptions as to the meanings of the Greek terms. Accordingly, to determine the exact significance of the fragments, he examines the meanings of the key terms by tracing their use, not only in the writings of Parmenides, but also in comparable passages from Empedocles and Homer. The results of these several independent investigations are made to reinforce each other by showing how they fit together in a single, self-consistent theory.

Parmenides is thus shown to be more in accord with Empedocles and less radically opposed to Heraclitus than is usually supposed. The author attributes to him a subtle, hylozoistic personalism in which each thing, composed of light and darkness, knows itself and is what it knows.

This raises a problem of double aspect. If all knowledge is a mixture of elements (frag. 16), is the Eleatic theory of immutable Being merely another opinion of an erring mortal? Or, if the first part of the poem is definitive, what point is there in elaborating a theory of the perceptible world with all its change?

The second phase of this problem Verdenius solves by assuming that Parmenides, even when talking about perceptions and change, surpasses other erring mortals in that he is well aware that he is wandering: he knows that Being alone is real, whereas they do not. The author might have referred to Plato's philosopher who descended again into the cave after his journey into the upper world. The sense world therefore is not mere illusion, but an inferior order of reality (58).

The first phase of the problem presents greater difficulty: if human knowledge, including Parmenides' own, is the result of a materialistic or even hylozoistic mixture of elements, does not the august Eleatic theory become just another behavioristic phenomenon? To solve this problem Verdenius goes beyond a strict interpretation of the text in his remarks on human responsibility; but the central part of his argument is somewhat as follows: Parmenides "makes no fundamental

distinction between man and the universe," yet "cosmic powers operate in him, not through chance, but through grace... He considers this grace at the same time as his own power and merit. (!) So to him human and divine initiative coincide" (12).

Whether this solution is satisfactory or not will determine whether there is a flaw in this gem of scholarship. The flaw may be in the reviewer; or it might even be in Parmenides.

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