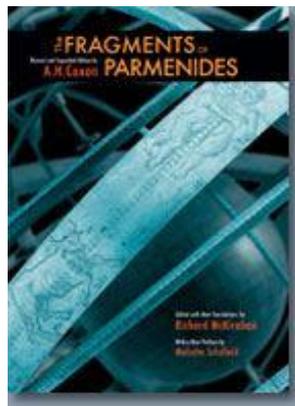




Allan H. Coxon (a cura di), *The Fragments of Parmenides*



segnalazione di Sofia Ranzato

After the republication in 2008 of Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* (1970) – revised by the author himself – “Parmenides Publishing” has given a new generation of scholars and students Coxon’s edition of the fragments of Parmenides. The new version of this book that, after H. Diels’ *Parmenides Lehrgedicht* (1897), imposed itself as the “classical” edition of Parmenides’ text, was revised by Richard McKirahan, a scholar who has extensively worked on Presocratics.

Actually, Coxon’s edition was the first, after Diels’ one, to be based on a systematic consultation of the main manuscripts of the works of Simplicius, Sextus Empiricus and Proclus who quote key sections of Parmenides’ poem.

And, just to offer an example of the consequences of this thorough study, we may remind how Coxon's note (CQ xviii, 1968, P. 75), that the variant *pant'aste* in B1.3 was based on a false reading of *codex N* by Mutschmann, the editor of Sextus, changed completely the way of approaching this passage. Before Coxon's emendation, the false reading *pant'aste* had been generally accepted, because it makes good sense in comparison with the meaningless readings of the other manuscripts of Sextus. So, even after Coxon's correction, some scholars accepted *pant'aste* no longer as a reading but as a good conjecture. Anyway, looking at *pant'aste* just as a conjecture opened the way to different emendations and led us to a more cautious reading of the verse.

Coxon showed his independence from Diels' edition in many other aspects of his work. He actually included an expanded collection of the Ancient *Testimonia* – for example writing in the Velian Inscription and replaced the thematic order chosen by Diels with a chronological one that seems apter to understand the history of the reception of Parmenides' thought and the mutual dependence of some sources. Both the thorough study of the manuscripts and the consideration of the *Testimonia* from an historical perspective allowed Coxon to supply us with a good analysis of the complex textual tradition of Parmenides' fragments in his *Introduction* (pp. 1-7).

Moreover Coxon changed – even if not in a radical way – the disposition of the fragments as it was established in the fifth edition of Diels and Kranz *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (1934-37) and, even if Coxon doesn't always support his choice by stronger arguments than Diels', it opened the way for a more critical consideration of D-K's order of the fragments, generally accepted earlier as a well established fact. And, in my opinion, Coxon's disposition of the first fragments of the last part of the poem as 10, 11, 9, 12 DK, represents a better arrangement than D-K's one, both for the traditional introductive character of fr. 10-11 (DK) – for which see C's suggested parallels with Hes. *Th.* 108-10 and Emped. Fr. 38 – and because it paired together the two fragments (9, 12 DK) focused on the distribution of the two principles of light and night in the phenomenal world. The fact that Simplicius (t. 215 C) quoted fr. 9 immediately after fr. 8. 53-59 – where the two cosmic principles have been presented for the first time – saying that this passage occurred in Parmenides "a few verses" later (*kai met'oliga palin*) than fr. 8-59 is not actually a compelling reason to make fr. 9 follow directly fr. 8: he actually uses almost the same expression in quoting B12 DK after B8. 61.

Coxon also made clear how much Parmenides' speech owes to the epic tradition, through the inclusion in his edition, at the foot of the pages – together with the *apparatus criticus* –, of the references to passages of traditional Greek epic that Parmenides seems to echo in his poem. So it helps us to realise how Parmenides' use of traditional formular expressions reminded the public of familiar images to help them in their understanding of his new and difficult message. This *apparatus* is paired with references to passages of the following philosophical production strongly modelled on Parmenides' formal expressions. This second system of references makes clear how the following philosophical speculation found Parmenides' ontology fundamental and repeats his stock expressions when it tackles the subjects of being, becoming and passing-away. The reader should be warned that both these systems of references do not claim to be complete and that they should be used as a starting point by those who want to elaborate on the relation between Parmenides and the epic tradition, or about his influence in the following philosophic speculation.

The realisation that the form of Parmenides' poem is strongly modelled on the traditional epic language, prompted Coxon to restore epic and ionic forms even where they have not been recorded by the manuscripts. Although Coxon's approach seems to rectify the highly sceptical attitude that drove Diels to print the word-forms presented in the manuscript, it seems that Coxon is too systematic in his restoration, deliberately disregarding the influence of the local dialects on Parmenides'

language. So, even if we can sympathise with the general methodology of Coxon in approaching Parmenides' linguistic forms, it seems that it lacks a specific analysis of each different disputed form.

A really striking feature of Coxon's first edition is the lack of a bibliography, which seems to go along with Coxon's leaving aside most of the contributions of the preceding scholars in his commentary of Parmenides' text, even if implicitly demonstrating he has read most of them. And it is really surprising that these deficiencies have not been removed from the new edition.

The strongest innovation of the new edition should be found in the clear-cut intention of giving access to this useful instrument of study to a wider public including people that do not have a good knowledge of ancient Greek. Thus, in this new volume, new translations of the Ancient *Testimonia* by Richard McKirahan, together with an English-Greek glossary and a Greek-English Index based on these texts, have been added. In the *Introduction*, *Commentary* and *Appendix* – focused on Zeno's and Melissus's philosophy – all the Greek sentences and words have been translated into English. If we consider that Parmenides is taken into account not just by classicists but by everyone that is somehow connected with the key problems of philosophy, the new edition could be appreciated as a good contribution to the diffusion of Parmenides' original thought.

As to the collection of *Ancient Testimonia* McKirahan adds a passage from Diogenes Laertius (171. 2 = T16a) that seems to ascribe to Xenocrates the composition of a book about Parmenides' writings that may confirm the careful attention that the Academy used to reserve to this thinker.

Some changes, corrections and additions are included in this new edition by McKirahan, after consulting the notes that Coxon wrote down in two of his copies of the previous edition, then labelled by the editor as "A" and "B". These modifications do not seem to change substantially the previous edition, apart from the new translation and interpretation of fr. 8. 34-41. These are some of the most difficult verses of Parmenides' poem both because they involve the relation between being and thinking – one of the most disputed topics in the interpretation of Parmenides' thought – and because they are oddly inserted between the definition of Being as unmoved and perfect and its comparison with the image of the volume of a spherical ball. Coxon's new comment to these verses seems more interested in finding a link with what comes first. Thus, while in the first edition, these verses have been considered a digression from the general discussion of the nature of Being, focalising on the changing things that the human beings wrongly suppose to be real (8. 38-41), the comment printed in the new edition under the new heading *The direct object of thinking is identical with the cause of the thought* tries to stress that the perfection that causes the unchanging identity of Being is at the same time the object and the cause of thought. And, in Coxon's interpretation of vv. 36-7 it seems that the real object and the real cause for thinking is Being and the attribution to it of the terms earlier in the poem called *semata* (sings B8.2). In this conclusion the new comment doesn't diverge so much from the previous one even if it is based on a different translation of the verses. The new translation of *en ho pephatismenon estin* ("when predications have been asserted of it" B.8 35) interprets it as the practice of asserting predications of Being, while in the first edition it has been understood as an impersonal sentence ("when one thing has been said of another"). This, as the new translation of the start of the following verse *heureseis to noein* "will you find the cause so as to conceive of it" instead of the simpler previous version "will you find conceiving", shows how Coxon has tried for all his life to find new interpretations of the most difficult passages of Parmenides' text, sometimes – as in the previous example – basing perhaps his understanding on a reading that presupposes a too complicated syntax of the text.

On the whole, in the new version of his translation and commentary, Coxon seems more concerned in finding links between different parts of the poem. For example, in the comment at B20

1-2 (B19DK), Coxon observed that the expression *kata doxan* (according to belief) “is synonymous with *dokimos* [“in general acceptance”] (fr. 1.32)” (p. 387).

Coxon’s edition of Parmenides’ fragments – with his rich and openly subjective *Introduction* and *Commentary* – represents a corner-stone in the Parmenidean studies, coming as a result of a deep reflection which lasted through Coxon’s entire life. So, the new publication of this volume, enriched by the English translations, should be considered as a significant contribution to the diffusion of the thought of one of the most important thinkers in the history of philosophy.

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