

Jaap Mansfeld *et al.*

ELEATICA 2012:

Melissus between Miletus and Elea

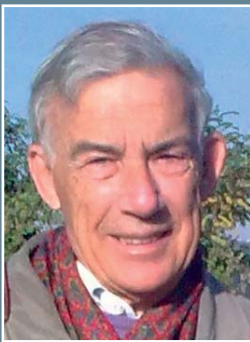
A cura di Massimo Pulpito



ELEATICA è il nome della sessione scientifica, promossa dalla Fondazione Alario per Elea-Velia ONLUS, che ha luogo ad Ascea, nei pressi dell'antica Elea, con l'intervento di autorevoli specialisti.

Melisso di Samo ha condizionato a lungo la ricezione antica di Parmenide di Elea. Ciò a dispetto (o forse a causa) di quella che nei suoi ragionamenti appare come una perdita della ricchezza semantica e dell'aura di mistero che caratterizzano il discorso di Parmenide. Nelle Lezioni Eleatiche qui presentate, Jaap Mansfeld indaga con acume e osservazioni inedite l'opera di 'disambiguazione' del parmenidismo condotta dal filosofo di Samo, oltre ad offrire un'istruttiva storia della presenza di Melisso nella tradizione antica. Contribuendo in tal modo a far conoscere più in profondità questa singolare forma di 'eleatismo senza lacrime'.

Il libro si arricchisce di una bibliografia ragionata su Melisso, che copre l'ultimo mezzo secolo di studi, e soprattutto di un articolato dibattito sulle Lezioni, che ha coinvolto nove studiosi.



Jaap Mansfeld is emeritus professor of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy in the University of Utrecht. He is a fellow of the Koninklijke Hollandsche Maatschappij der Wetenschappen, the Royal Dutch Academy, and the Academia Europaea. His previous publications did not include Melissus. Together with David T. Runia he is writing an edition with commentary of the doxographer Aëtius.

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Melissus between
Miletus and Elea

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Indice

Introduzione

| | |
|--|---|
| Lo Straniero di Samo (<i>M. Pulpito</i>) | 9 |
|--|---|

Le lezioni

| | |
|--|-----|
| Melissus between Miletus and Elea (<i>J. Mansfeld</i>) | 71 |
| I Eleatic philosophy without tears | 71 |
| II Melissus in the ancient tradition, from Isocrates to Simplicius | 85 |
| III Further problems | 95 |
| References | 108 |

Il dibattito

| | |
|---|-----|
| Melisso: il tradimento del pensiero eleatico (<i>G. Calenda</i>) | 115 |
| Ruminations on Mansfeld's Melissus (<i>P. Curd</i>) | 123 |
| Immobilità e vuoto in Parmenide e Melisso (<i>S. Daniele</i>) | 129 |
| Οἱ τοῦ ὄλου στασιῶται. Il <i>Teeteto</i> su Parmenide e Melisso in rapporto al problema mereologico (<i>S. Di Girolamo</i>) | 137 |
| Sulla logica dimostrativa di Melisso (<i>F. Marcacci</i>) | 145 |
| The early tradition on Melissus and Parmenides (<i>J. Palmer</i>) | 150 |
| Udire suoni o ascoltare parole? Un commento a Mansfeld su 30 B8 DK (<i>M. Pulpito</i>) | 157 |
| Parmenides' and Melissus' <i>being</i> without not-being (<i>C. Robbiano</i>) | 165 |
| Un Melisso molto innovativo (<i>L. Rossetti</i>) | 175 |
| La replica del Prof. Mansfeld: Some Comments on Comments | 180 |
| Gli autori | 192 |
| Indice dei nomi | 196 |

Introduzione

Lo Straniero di Samo

Massimo Pulpito

L'ultimo degli Eleati

*Vie più che 'ndarno da riva si parte,
perché non torna tal qual e' si move,
chi pesca per lo vero e non ha l'arte.
E di ciò sono al mondo aperte prove
Parmenide, Melisso e Brisso e molti,
li quali andaro e non sapëan dove.
(Paradiso, XIII 121-126)*

Tra i numerosi personaggi storici menzionati da Dante nella sua *Commedia*, anche Melisso di Samo, il filosofo e ammiraglio che sconfisse gli Ateniesi nel V sec. a.C.¹, ha il suo posto d'onore. E, senza sorpresa, si tratta di una menzione di tipo polemico: il suo nome, assieme ad altri, sta infatti ad indicare quel che un filosofo *non* deve essere.

Riferendo le parole attribuite a Tommaso d'Aquino, i sei versi danno modo a Dante di portare il discorso su tre pensatori dell'antichità, riconosciuti come emblemi dell'errore compiuto da coloro che credono di stare nel giusto pur non possedendone i mezzi. Da qui l'invito di Tommaso alla prudenza e quindi a procedere con metodo e discernimento, la cui assenza condurrebbe inevitabilmente all'errore. Significativa la scelta degli esempi, e cioè tre nomi legati alla storia dell'eleatismo e delle sue ultime propaggini. Non ci sono solo Parmenide, il maestro di Elea, e Melisso, l'epigono di Samo, ma anche Brisone di Eraclea, che secondo la tradizione sarebbe stato discepolo di Euclide di Megara, ed è noto come ai Megarici si attribuisca una ripresa delle dottrine degli Eleati (non solo dell'ontologia parmenidea, ma anche della dialettica zenoniana). La triade filosofica condannata compariva già, con

¹ La notizia è riportata da Plutarco, *Per.* 26.2-3 e dalla Suda, s.v. Μέλιτος Λάρου (si vedano le testimonianze raccolte in 30 A2-3 DK).

un identico trattamento (anche se approfondito, e non semplicemente accennato) in Alberto Magno (*In Phys.* I 2, 1-10), a cui forse Dante si è ispirato.

Ma, com'è ovvio, la fonte ultima a cui risalgono tali giudizi è Aristotele. Il filosofo si era soffermato sul tentativo di quadratura del cerchio compiuto da Brisone, giudicandolo un tipico argomento eristico (*An. post.* I 9, 75b 40; *Soph. el.* 11, 171b 16, 172a 4). Quanto a Parmenide e Melisso, Aristotele aveva indirizzato contro di loro (sovente in maniera congiunta) alcune celebri accuse (la trattazione più ampia è in *Phys.* I 2-3, 184b 15-187a 11). Egli contestava ai due filosofi di sostenere tesi al limite della 'follia' (*Gen. Corr.* I 8, 325a 19), poiché da un lato assumevano premesse false, dall'altro non argomentavano nemmeno in modo corretto² (*Phys.* I 2, 185a 9-10), scompaginando per di più l'ordine delle scienze, ossia trasferendo alla fisica temi e questioni proprie della filosofia prima (*Cael.* III 1, 298b 17-24). Eppure, sebbene Brisone sarà da lui sbrigativamente liquidato come erista, e Parmenide, come si è detto, verrà spesso associato a Melisso come esempio di approccio filosofico fallace, dei tre sarà il Samio a pagare il prezzo più alto a seguito della condanna aristotelica.

Aristotele pronuncia giudizi durissimi su Melisso, talvolta al fine di distinguerlo da Parmenide, a cui pure lo aveva affiancato; e quando non opera questa distinzione, è solo per mostrare come egli condivida i difetti (e non i pregi, che pure riconosce) del filosofo di Elea. Il ragionamento di Melisso, sentenza Aristotele, è *più grossolano* (μᾶλλον φορτικός) di quello di Parmenide (*Phys.* I 2, 185a 10-11; 3, 186a 8-9); Senofane e Melisso sono alquanto *rozzi* (ἀγροικότεροι), e li si può senz'altro *tralasciare* (ἀφετέοι), a differenza di Parmenide che sembra ragionare con più ponderatezza (*Metaph.* I 5, 986b 25-27). E se è vero che Parmenide e Melisso *ragionano in modo eristico* (ἐριστικῶς συλλογίζονται), che il secondo *sragioni* del tutto (παράλογίζεται) è *palese* (δῆλον) (*Phys.* I 3, 186a 6-11). Ma qual è, esattamente, il peccato filosofico di cui si è macchiato Melisso? Aristotele discute più volte la filosofia dell'ammiraglio samio. Nei capitoli 2-3 del primo libro della *Fisica*, in cui esamina la dottrina degli Eleati, egli discute ad esempio la tesi melissiana dell'infinità dell'Essere, mostrando l'errore che essa implica (l'infinito pertiene alla quantità, non alla qualità o alla sostanza). Nella *Metafisica*, poco prima di accusare Senofane e Melisso di rozzezza, Aristotele propone la celebre distinzione tra i monismi di Parmenide e di Melisso: il primo avrebbe inteso l'Uno secondo la forma (κατὰ τὸν λόγον), mentre Melisso secondo la materia (κατὰ τὴν ὕλην), distinzione che sembra implicare anche una minore raffinatezza concettuale del Samio, definito di lì a poco, appunto, ἀγροικότερος.

Ma l'accusa principale risiede nell'attribuzione di una fallacia logica, cosa su cui Aristotele insiste in più punti della sua opera³, quasi fosse per lui il segno inconfondibile della scadente caratura del filosofo di Samo. Il paralogismo riguarderebbe

² Dante accenna a questa accusa aristotelica in *Mon.* III 4, 4.

³ Si vedano le testimonianze raccolte sotto la sigla A10 nell'edizione di G. Reale, *Melisso. Testimonianze e frammenti*, Firenze 1970, 348-353 (ora in M. Untersteiner, G. Reale, *Eleati: Parmenide - Zenone*

la dimostrazione dell'infinità dell'Essere a partire dalla sua ingeneratezza che troviamo in 30 B2 DK, ricavato da una citazione di Simplicio: esso consisterebbe nella falsa inferenza da 'tutto ciò che è generato ha un principio' a 'tutto ciò che non è generato non ha un principio' (oppure secondo un'altra versione equivalente, 'tutto ciò che ha un principio è generato'). Si tratterebbe, insomma, di una fallacia formale di 'negazione dell'antecedente' (o di 'affermazione del conseguente'). L'accusa assume importanza dato il valore che Aristotele riconosceva alla correttezza formale dei ragionamenti, e la centralità della tenuta argomentativa per un filosofo come Melisso, che affidava al ragionamento consequenziale la chiave per la comprensione della realtà. Ma anche così, questo non sembra bastare a spiegare tutto ciò che ne è seguito.

Questo è, infatti, l'inizio della decadenza di Melisso (e, in parallelo, di un travisamento dello stesso Parmenide, i cui presupposti erano però già in Platone). Il giudizio di Aristotele di fatto fornirà la struttura di base per i successivi pareri espressi sul conto di Melisso, anche quando le ragioni addotte saranno diverse. Ciò a cui si assiste, ricorda di fatto quel che è accaduto con la sofistica: in sede storica la difficoltà di liberarsi dai canoni platonici e aristotelici ha determinato un'attitudine valutativa (ma sarebbe forse più corretto dire 'svalutativa') nei confronti dei Sofisti, che ne ha impedito per lungo tempo uno studio critico non parziale. Ma nel caso di Melisso vi è un'aggravante. Ai Sofisti, nonostante il marchio millenario di cattivi filosofi, non si è mai negata l'originalità. L'accomunamento con Parmenide ha invece generato una seconda insidia storiografica per Melisso: egli non solo è stato giudicato un cattivo filosofo, al pari dei Sofisti (tanto da meritare più di una menzione negli *Elenchi sofistici* da parte del Filosofo per eccellenza) ma è stato reputato anche un pensatore niente affatto originale. Se è vero, infatti, che le dottrine di Parmenide e Melisso possono essere accostate (come insegna Aristotele) e che Parmenide precede cronologicamente Melisso, allora è al primo che spetta la paternità di quella linea di pensiero. Di più, se poi sempre Aristotele attribuisce esclusivamente al secondo errori che Parmenide non avrebbe compiuto, tanto da indurlo a parlarne con più disprezzo e ad ammettere che in fondo l'Eleate – che viene prima – parlava con più ocularità, il disegno è compiuto: Melisso è stato un filosofo incapace di elaborazione teorica autonoma, e lì dove ha osato allontanarsi dal maestro ha ottenuto soltanto di trivializzarne il messaggio.

È questo lo stigma che ha caratterizzato la 'fortuna' di Melisso. Il giudizio aristotelico, ripetuto dai commentatori, ha così attraversato i secoli. Se si eccettuano casi sporadici⁴, al filosofo non si riserva pressoché mai un neutrale resoconto delle sue posizioni, ma gli si unisce un giudizio di valore, oppure, quando questo non

- *Melisso. Testimonianze e frammenti*, Milano 2011, 1016-1021). Non stupisce che le attestazioni migliori siano negli *Elenchi sofistici*.

⁴ Un raro caso di trattamento 'avalutativo' è nel *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* di Pierre Bayle, nella nota D alla voce *Manichéens*, in cui il filosofo immagina una disputa sul tema della teodicea tra Melisso, difensore per eccellenza del monismo, e Zoroastro, ideale precursore del dualismo manicheo. Va detto, però, che anche in questo caso non è Melisso ad avere la meglio.

avviene, lo si marginalizza, concedendogli solo poche righe o addirittura non menzionandolo affatto. Non stupisce quindi che Albertelli, nel suo volume del 1939⁵, emettesse questa lapidaria sentenza: ‘il pensiero occidentale può fare tranquillamente a meno di Melisso di Samo’ (213). Dopo più di due millenni Melisso continuava quindi ad essere giudicato ἀφετέος, proprio come aveva sancito Aristotele. In realtà, quel che Albertelli decretava, aveva già trovato attuazione nella storiografia filosofica moderna. Già Brucker nella *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (Leipzig 1742) trattando *De Secta eleatica*⁶ dedicava dieci pagine a Parmenide, cinque pagine a Zenone, e tra questi due riservava una sola pagina a Melisso, con la seguente giustificazione: ‘Nihil in his est, quod non Parmenideam metaphysicam sapiat, et ibi explicatum sit’ (1167). Dal canto suo Eberhard nella *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie* (Halle 1788), libro in cui compare per la prima volta l’espressione ‘vorsokratische philosophie’, poi canonizzata nell’uso sostantivato che ne farà Diels più di un secolo dopo, sfrutterà le poche righe assegnate a Melisso per ricordare che Aristotele lo giudicava ἀγροικότερος (91). Nelle hegeliane *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* pubblicate postume a Berlino nel 1833, tra le dieci pagine per Parmenide e le ben ventisei pagine per il ‘dialettico’ Zenone, si trova solo una pagina e mezza per Melisso (anche qui per buona parte riservate alla testimonianza aristotelica). Nell’inedito trattatello nietzscheano *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* del 1873, Melisso, a differenza di Parmenide e Zenone, non è nemmeno menzionato. Non stupisce, quindi, se ancora nel 1935 (quattro anni prima della ‘sentenza’ di Albertelli) Capelle tralasciasse del tutto Melisso nella sua raccolta dei frammenti dei *Vorsokratiker*⁷.

Quel che è avvenuto nella stagione gloriosa della storiografia tedesca ci dà l’idea di quale fosse il quadro generale della ricezione moderna dell’opera di Melisso. Ma più della marginalizzazione, sono indicativi i giudizi espressi sul Samio, che talvolta superano in durezza le già aspre valutazioni aristoteliche. Zeller⁸ ebbe a dire di lui: ‘Er erscheint neben Parmenides und Zeno nur als ein Philosoph zweiten Rangs’ (444)⁹. In un articolo del 1880¹⁰ non ostile a Melisso, Franz Kern mostrava il livello di disprezzo, per certi versi inconsapevole, verso il Samio a cui la critica contemporanea era giunta; commentando la posizione di Brandis¹¹ sulla presunta e spesso riaffermata confusione melissiana tra infinità spaziale e infinità temporale, egli scriveva incisivamente: ‘Zeitliche und räumliche Existenz geradezu mit einander zu ver-

⁵ P. Albertelli, *Gli Eleati, testimonianze e frammenti*, Bari 1939 (ora Milano 2014).

⁶ Tomus primus, Pars II, Lib. II, Cap. XI.

⁷ W. Capelle, *Die Vorsokratiker. Fragmente und Quellenberichte*, Stuttgart 1935.

⁸ E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Tübingen 1856.

⁹ Lo storico, tuttavia, aggiungeva: ‘aber doch immerhin als ein für Seine Zeit achtungswerther Denker’ (*ibid.*).

¹⁰ F. Kern, ‘Zur Würdigung des Melissos von Samos’, in *Festschrift des Stettiner Stadtgymnasiums zur Begrüßung der XXXV. Versammlung Deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner*, Stettin 1880, 1-24.

¹¹ C.A. Brandis, *Commentationes Eleaticae: Xenophanis Parmenidis et Melissi doctrina et propriis philosophorum reliquiis veterumque auctorum testimoniis*, Pars prima, Altona 1813, 202.

wechseln, das heisst ja nicht eine philosophische Unklarheit sich zu Schulden kommen lassen, nicht einen logischen Fehler begehen, sondern für die simpelsten Menschengedanken sich ganz unfähig zeigen' (15). Nelle sue lezioni universitarie sulla filosofia greca tenute a Clermont-Ferrand, Bergson ebbe a dire che 'Mélissos n'est pas un philosophe original. Il a développé la doctrine des Éléates dans le sens matérialiste' (180)¹²; e questo per il filosofo francese non era certo un complimento. Emblematiche le parole con cui Theodor Gomperz apriva il paragrafo dei suoi *Griechische Denker*¹³ dedicato al filosofo di Samo: 'Melissos ist das *enfant terrible* der Metaphysik. Das naive Ungeschick seiner Fehlschlüsse plaudert manch ein Geheimnis aus, das die Kunst seiner verfeinerten Nachfolger sorglich zu hüten verstanden hat' (149). Reinhardt, dal canto suo, nel suo fondamentale *Parmenides*¹⁴ dichiarò: 'ich halte Melissos für einen Dilettanten' (110). Lo stesso Albertelli, nel già citato volume, lo definì figura 'tenue e smilza' (211), riducendolo a un mero 'frutto fuori stagione' (213), e comunque 'pensatore elementare' (231). Per Guthrie, che dedica a Melisso alcune pagine della sua celebre storia della filosofia greca¹⁵, il filosofo samio si caratterizza per la sua preferenza verso una 'explicit, pedestrian, and sometimes wearisomely repetitive argumentation' oltre che per una certa 'verbosity' (103); alcuni improvvisi passaggi logici sono tipici della 'irritating form of Melissus's argumentation' (104). Il punto più evidente della sua debolezza, come già vide Aristotele, è la deduzione dell'infinità dell'essere, e questo nonostante Melisso possedesse 'excellent arguments' a favore dell'unità dell'essere – ma eccellenti perché 'inherited from Parmenides' (106): quanto all'infinità, 'this he attempted to prove, unfortunately for our good opinion of him, in ways which show him to have been still capable of a rather primitive confusion of thought' (106).

Anche in tempi più recenti, nei quali si è assistito a un rinnovato e crescente interesse verso i frammenti di Parmenide, a Melisso sono stati rivolti giudizi severi in merito alla degradazione a cui egli avrebbe sottoposto il pensiero del maestro di Elea. Nel 1988¹⁶ Matson scrisse che Melisso può essere definito 'only an Eleatic by courtesy' (331): egli è 'notoriously a sloppy logician' (332). In un articolo del 1999 intitolato significativamente 'Una tragedia filosófica: del 'se es' de Parménides al Ser-Uno de Meliso'¹⁷, Cordero qualifica il Samio come una 'débil caricatura' (284) di Parmenide: il passaggio dell' 'è' parmenideo all' 'Uno' melissiano sarebbe 'no sólo ilegítimo sino también abusivo' (287). Nell'importante libro del 2009 su Parmenide e la filosofia presocratica¹⁸, Palmer ha scritto che quella di Melisso è una posizione

¹² Si tratta del *Cahier noir*, redatto da uno studente anonimo, che riporta le lezioni tenute da Bergson nel 1884-1885. La citazione è tratta da H.-L. Bergson, *Cours sur la philosophie grecque*, Paris 2000.

¹³ T. Gomperz, *Griechische Denker. Eine Geschichte der antiken Philosophie*, Leipzig 1896.

¹⁴ K. Reinhardt, *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie*, Bonn 1916.

¹⁵ W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy. Vol. II: The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus*, Cambridge 1965, 101-118.

¹⁶ W.I. Matson, 'The Zeno of Plato and Tannery Vindicated', *La Parola del Passato* 43 (1988), 312-336.

¹⁷ In *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofía* 25 (1999), 283-293.

¹⁸ J. Palmer, *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*, Oxford 2009.

filosofica che ‘no serious metaphysician should want to adopt’ (38): quello che lui chiama ‘the aping Melissus’ (223) – e colui che sarebbe stato ‘scimmiettato’ è evidentemente Parmenide – avrebbe ideato argomenti che ‘involve fallacies of equivocation so that his conclusions do not follow’ (224). Per questo, la filosofia di Melisso secondo Palmer non sarebbe che una ‘perverse deformation of Parmenides’ serious metaphysical vision’, e come avrebbero poi capito filosofi seri come Platone e Aristotele, egli non sarebbe altro che ‘a basically crude and negligible thinker when compared to the more profound Parmenides’ (224). Nel recente saggio dedicato all’epistemologia nel pensiero presocratico¹⁹, Calenda, in un capitolo espressamente intitolato ‘Gli equivoci di Melisso’, lo bolla come ‘imitatore poco sottile’ (265), la cui esposizione è ‘contorta’ (273), il cui ‘testo favorisce proprio il genere d’equivoci che hanno fatto apparire assurda la posizione eleatica’ (282), dalle ‘tipiche incongruenze’ (289), in cui è ‘inutile cercare un rigore logico’ (292), le cui ‘dimostrazioni non richiedono il difficile sforzo di astrazione necessario per comprendere la profondità dei versi parmenidei; sono perciò più accessibili, e il fatto che manchino di rigore e portino a conclusioni assurde ne rende più agevole la critica’ (297); insomma, a lui si deve ‘un eleatismo sommario [...] totalmente privo di senso’ (298). In un precedente volume della stessa collana *Eleatica* a cui appartiene il libro qui introdotto (2013)²⁰, Gemelli Marciano ha scritto: ‘Una traccia di interpretazione deviante del testo parmenideo si ritrova solo in Melisso che è però di Samo e non è affatto un allievo di Parmenide come lo rappresenta la tradizione peripatetica, ma semplicemente un superficiale esegeta’ (273).

Rispetto a Parmenide e Zenone, dunque, Melisso appare davvero come l’ultimo tra gli Eleati, se non per ragioni cronologiche (data l’incertezza della cronologia di tutti i protagonisti dell’eleatismo), quantomeno da un punto di vista assiologico: un personaggio minore, una comparsa, comunque il meno interessante, il meno ammirevole (l’ultimo, appunto) degli Eleati.

Ma questa carrellata di considerazioni al limite dell’ingiurioso, seppure sintomatica, resta solo una semplificazione. In realtà, il quadro esegetico è ben più complesso.

O forse il primo

Non sono mancate voci dissonanti. Tra gli specialisti che si sono occupati direttamente di Melisso (e non quindi inserendolo in un quadro storiografico più generale) più volte, e sempre più spesso, si è assistito a un tentativo di revisione dello schema aristotelico, fino ad una piena rivalutazione del filosofo. Come ha scritto uno dei protagonisti di questa operazione revisionista: ‘tutti i tentativi fatti, o che si facciano, per un ridimensionamento qualsiasi degli antichi filosofi sono subordinati al

¹⁹ G. Calenda, *Epistemologia greca del VI e V secolo a.C. Eraclito e gli Eleati*, Roma 2011.

²⁰ M.L. Gemelli Marciano *et al.*, *Parmenide: suoni, immagini, esperienza. Con alcune considerazioni ‘inattuali’ su Zenone*, a cura di L. Rossetti e M. Pulpito, Sankt Augustin 2013.

grado di scarto di cui riusciamo ad essere capaci nei confronti di Aristotele²¹. Com'è noto, da tempo (perlomeno da Cherniss²² in poi) la storia della filosofia antica sta giustamente mettendo in discussione la dossografia aristotelica. Eppure, come si è visto, nella maggioranza dei casi il giudizio della storiografia classica è stato 'pilotato' dalla presa di posizione aristotelica, pedissequamente ripetuta come un mantra. In questo caso, poi, il quadro è meno lineare di quel che appare. È vero, infatti, che Melisso ha subito il trattamento che abbiamo detto, ma è significativo che Platone non avesse avuto verso il Samio il medesimo atteggiamento.

Nel *Teeteto* (183e), ad esempio, allorché Socrate pronuncia la celebre descrizione omerica di Parmenide quale 'venerando e terribile', Platone fa precedere a questo giudizio un riferimento a Melisso: è vero che qui propone una comparazione tra i due (e tutti coloro che credono che l'universo sia uno e immobile) certamente non favorevole a Melisso, ma lo fa in un modo che è tutt'altro che insultante per quest'ultimo. Socrate, infatti, dice che per quanto possa provare rispetto verso Melisso e gli altri che sostengono le medesime cose, il timore di trattarli grossolanamente, che egli ha, è sempre minore rispetto a ciò che prova per il solo Parmenide. Il che però vuol dire che egli *rispetta e teme* Melisso. E infatti in questo passo compare il termine φορτικῶς, che però, a differenza che in Aristotele, non sta a indicare la rozzezza di Melisso, ma quella di chi a lui si accosta: come dire che grossolano è il modo di trattare un filosofo di tal fatta. Non è un caso, del resto, se nello stesso dialogo (180d) Platone parli al plurale di Μέλισσοί τε καὶ Παρμενίδαι: non solo Melisso precede Parmenide, ma i due sono distinti. Melisso non rientra nel novero dei Παρμενίδαι, ma, seppure affiancato a Parmenide, possiede una propria personalità filosofica. In tutto questo non c'è traccia di spregio.

Se poi si volge l'attenzione anche ad altri documenti che testimoniano la ricezione dell'eleatismo tra il V e il IV sec., ci si accorge non solo che negli sporadici riferimenti a Melisso non si assiste ad una sottovalutazione analoga a quella poi manifestata da Aristotele, ma che per un certo periodo è stata proprio la dottrina di Melisso a offrire le chiavi di lettura dell'intera stagione eleatica. E ciò rende il caso Melisso meno semplice di quel che poteva apparire ad un primo sguardo.

Senza rifiutare la *vulgata* melissiana, la presa d'atto di tale complessità è stata sintetizzata con chiarezza in anni recenti da Ferrari²³:

Il destino di Melisso, l'ultimo e il meno noto dei rappresentanti della scuola eleatica, è davvero curioso: il suo scritto *Sulla natura* (Περὶ φύσεως ἢ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος) non può certo vantare la forza evocativa e la potenza concettuale del poema di Parmenide o la sottigliezza dialettica degli argomenti di Zenone e neppure può esibire il carattere dirompente

²¹ R. Vitali, *Melisso di Samo: sul mondo o sull'essere. Una interpretazione dell'eleatismo*, Urbino 1973, 311.

²² H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*, Baltimore 1935.

²³ F. Ferrari, 'Melisso e la scuola eleatica', in L. Breglia e M. Lupi (a cura di), *Da Elea a Samo. Filosofie e politici di fronte all'impero ateniese*, Atti del Convegno di Studi di Santa Maria Capua Vetere (4-5 giugno 2003), Napoli 2005, 85-94.

Le lezioni

Melissus between Miletus and Elea

Jaap Mansfeld

I

Eleatic philosophy without tears

Abstract

Melissus presents us with an efficacious and comprehensible revision of the ontological arguments of Parmenides, but this version *nouvelle cuisine* succeeds at the cost of a loss of semantic richness, of productive problematisation, and of what we may call ‘mystery’.

I.1

Melissus of Samos is often mentioned and discussed together with Parmenides of Elea both in our ancient sources and in the modern professional literature, and with good reason. Even a cursory look at the verbatim remains of both these philosophers reveals that the core doctrine and argument of Melissus’ prose treatise are dependent on the ontology of the first part of the poem. In his own peculiar way Melissus belongs with the early reception of Parmenides. Several ancient sources moreover tell us that Melissus was Parmenides’ pupil. We do not know whether he ever met and listened to Parmenides the way Socrates claimed to have done in one of Plato’s novelettes, and it is of course idle to

speculate.¹ But it cannot be denied that he is a pupil of Parmenides in the spiritual sense of the term, even if Parmenides' thought is not the only influence upon his work. According to the practice of what (with some latitude) we may call ancient historians of philosophy, doctrinal allegiance and affinity are presented as varieties of a personal relationship, schools of thought in the process turning into schools tout court.

This closeness to Parmenides has proved to be handicap. In ancient sources, beginning with Aristotle (Plato is less severe), and also in our modern literature one encounters the verdict that Melissus is a sort of *Parmenides dimidiatus*, that is, that he to some extent debased the master's thought and even made elementary logical mistakes. In recent years Richard McKirahan and Edward Hussey have been quite critical.² But Simplicius, to whom we owe the fragments quoted *ad litteram*, says that Melissus, 'writing in prose, throughout his discourse disclosed his view' of the intelligible and sensible realm 'even more clearly than Parmenides'.³ In our own time various well-argued attempts have been made by among others John Earle Raven, Giovanni Reale, Renzo Vitali, Jonathan Barnes, Brian Merrill (in his important dissertation, which unfortunately has not been published), and John Palmer to prove that Melissus' metaphysical arguments are quite good, and that in his own right he is a much more interesting thinker than has sometimes been believed.⁴ But perhaps it is not such a good sign that ever so often he is believed to be in need of rehabilitation.

However this may be, it still seems worthwhile to look without prejudice at his presentation of the case for the assumption of a single Being that is infinite in both time and space, and to compare what he attributes or refuses to attribute to this Entity with Parmenides' conceptions.⁵ So I shall attempt to look at Parmenides with the eyes of Melissus.

To summarize briefly without entering into differences of opinion regarding the relative position of fragments or listing the difficulties caused by gaps in our

¹ According to the Apollodoran dates, the best we have, Melissus (*flor.* 444–441, Diog. Laert. 9.24 = Apollod. fr. 72 Jacoby) is sixty years younger than Parmenides (*flor.* 504–501, Diog. Laert. 9.23 = Apollod. fr. 341 Jacoby), which renders an apprenticeship most unlikely. The novelette is at *Parm.* 127a ff., see Mansfeld (1986), 41–45. Ath. 11.113.505f argues that 'making Plato's Socrates converse (ἐλθεῖν εἰς λόγους) with Parmenides does not fit Socrates' youth, let alone his formulating, or listening to, such complicated arguments'. A similar story, of which Serge Mouraviev reminded me, has Melissus converse (εἰς λόγους ἐλθεῖν) with Heraclitus, Diog. Laert. *loc. cit.* (cf. below, III.3, n. 50 and text thereto).

² McKirahan (1994), 295–298, Hussey (1997), 161–163.

³ Simp. *in Cael.* 558.17–18 Μέλισσος ὡς καταλογάδην γράμματος σαφέστερον ἔτι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ περὶ τούτων γνώμην ἐξέφηγε δι' ὅλου μὲν τοῦ λόγου κτλ. For the fragments see below, n. 5.

⁴ Raven (1948), 79–92, Reale (1970) *passim*, Vitali (1973) *passim*, Barnes (1979), 180–184, 214–217, 228–230, 298–302, Merrill (1998) *passim*, Palmer (2004) and (2009a), 48–49, 204–205.

⁵ The numeration of verbatim fragments will of course be that of Diels and Kranz. Aristocles' version of fr. 30 B8(2)–(3) DK (see below, II.3, n. 18) is inferior to Simplicius' text. The chapter on Melissus in Kirk, Raven and Schofield (1983), 390–401 is most useful. For a useful brief account of Melissus in Italian see Ferrari (2005).

evidence, we all know that Parmenides' poem falls into two parts, that it has a proem in which the poet meets a Goddess, and that the speech given by her that follows is to be judged by the poet. The first part of the poem (epistemology and ontology) argues for what is true, that is, for Being as the only true object of Thought, which is now, one, unmoved, unchanging, whole, indivisible, homogeneous, sphere-like, and in every way equal. The second part (we may call it by the name of physics) contains what is called a deceptive account of the world and men, based on the mistaken human assumption that there are two elements: Light and Night. Under what conditions a physics can be provided if Being is the unchanging and only object of Thought is a question that has been hotly debated in our scholarly literature but need not concern us here.

Like Parmenides Melissus provides a strong argument in favour of a Being that is one, unmoved, unchanging, whole, indivisible, homogeneous, and in every way equal; in his version it is moreover eternal and infinite, does not feel pain or distress, and does not possess a body. The way in which he answers for our visual and auditory experiences leaves no room for a philosophy of nature.

I.2

Differences in doctrine and presentation are outweighed by what Melissus and Parmenides have in common, but are nevertheless significant. I begin with the presentation, with regard to which simple comparative statistics are already illuminating. Parmenides invites us to believe that he has had an extraordinary experience: a meeting with a Goddess. Throughout the poem this Goddess addresses him in the second person singular or imperative of a verb, and in this context we find no less than 10 instances of the personal pronoun 'you' (σέ or σ' or σὺ or τοι), for the most part occurring at crucial moments in the exposition. The personal pronoun in the first person, 'me' (με or μ'), occurs five times in the proem, in the accusative, and already in its very first line: the poet is object not subject. With the exception of the passive form 'I [viz. the poet] was carried' also found in the proem, the first person singular of the verb is reserved for the Goddess. Beyond the proem the first person singular of the personal pronoun is reserved for her too. It occurs 4 times, viz. first, in the nominative, when the two ways of thinking are announced: 'I (ἐγών)⁶ will tell you, and do *you* (σὺ) preserve my account' (28 B3.1); then at their recapitulation, also in the nominative: 'these things I (ἐγώ) command *you* (σ', subject of acc. cum inf.) to heed' (28 B6.2). Both times we have a significant combination of the two pronouns 'I' and 'you'. The third time it occurs in the genitive, in combination with an imperative (28 B7.6–7): 'please judge (κρίναι) the much-contested proof stated by me (ἐξ

⁶ If *pace* Coxon we accept Karsten's conjecture.

ἐμέθεν). The fourth occurrence is a lone dative: ‘it is the same for me (μοι) ...’ (28 B5.1).^{6a}

No such personal experience or dramatic dialogue is found in Melissus’ text. Parmenides in his poem is instructed by his Goddess, while Melissus has been instructed by Parmenides’ poem outside his own treatise. Perhaps unsurprisingly the first and only time the personal pronoun ἐγώ and the first person singular of a verb occur in this treatise is as far down as fr. 30 B8. Here these words are not uttered by a divinity, but used by the author with reference to himself, as he pronounces the words: ‘such as *I* say (ἐγὼ φημι) that the One *is*’ (a formula that recalls the famous Pythagorean αὐτὸς ἔφα). The orator addresses his public. Melissus here refers back with some emphasis and perhaps even pride to his proofs concerned with a unique, immutable and indivisible Being. In the plural of the first person the pronoun occurs 4 times, but again only in this same fragment near the end of the argument of the treatise: once in the nominative, ‘if we (ἡμεῖς 30 B8(2)) see and hear rightly’, and three times in the dative, ‘seem(s) to us’ (ἔδοξεν ἡμῖν B8(2), δοκεῖ δὲ ἡμῖν B8(3), ἡμῖν δοκεῖ B8(4)). The verb forms in the first person plural also relate to human cognition: ‘we see and hear’ (ὁρῶμεν καὶ ἀκούομεν, cited above), ‘we say’ (φαμεν, B8(2)). But this ‘we’ and this ‘us’ pertain to humans in general and must include the author, however strongly he distances the true doctrine from the cognitive habits of humanity. Such a use of ‘we’ or ‘us’ is excluded in Parmenides, as it is a Goddess who speaks, one who has welcomed a visitor who has traveled far from the haunts of men.⁷ In Parmenides humans are not a ‘we’ but always a ‘they’, which they are only once in a fragment of Melissus (φασὶν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, B8(2)), where however in the context they are surrounded by ‘we’s and ‘us’ses.⁸

The word *doxa*, δόξα, which in Parmenides plays such a notorious part in relation to the cognitions of humans and so contrasts strongly with truth and the true, is not found in Melissus, but the concept of ‘seeming’ still occupies a prominent position in his treatise. It is expressed, as we see, by verbal formulas such as ‘it seems to us’, ἡμῖν δοκεῖ *vel. sim.*, expressions that fail to fit Parmenides’ metre. In Melissus fr. 30 B8, just as in Parmenides, this concept of seeming or appearance or opinion is explicitly opposed to that of truth, or reality. Humans say that the things or events they see or hear of are true, or real (φασὶν ... εἶναι ἀληθῆ, B8(2)). Thus, ‘it seems to us’ (to us, humans) that opposites change into each other, but this would not happen ‘if these were real (or true)’ things or events (εἰ ἀληθῆ ἦν), so what ‘seems’ to us to be the case does so ‘wrongly’ (οὐδὲ ... ὀρθῶς δοκεῖ). ‘Nothing’, i.e. none of these purported events, ‘is stronger than true Being’ (τοῦ γὰρ ἐόντος ἀληθινοῦ κρεῖσσον οὐδέν, B8(5)).

^{6a} For these pronouns cf. Heitsch (1974), 63–64.

⁷ Fr. 28 B1.27.B

⁸ Frs. 28 B1.30, B6.4–6, B8.39.53–55, B19.3.

This opposition between what is true, or real, on the one hand and what seems to us on the other is elucidated by appealing to the claim that a thing, to be real, should be just like the author says Being is. In Parmenides the fundamental opposition between *alētheia* on the one hand and human *doxai* (in which there is no true trust) on the other is stipulated by the Goddess in the proem at the outset of the whole poem (and so at the outset of Part I as well), and for the second time at the outset of Part II, at the beginning of the cosmology, so both times in much more strategic places.⁹ And the (rhetorical) concepts of persuasion (*πειθῶ*) and trust (*πίστις*), which in Parmenides are linked with truth,¹⁰ are absent in Melissus.

Accordingly, Melissus strips Parmenides' account of its wonderful mystagogical, rhetorical, and psychological paraphernalia. His discourse is entirely secular. A similar reduction may be recognized in his treatment of the laborious Parmenidean disjunction of Being and non-Being by means of their fundamental relation to thinking and thought (*νοῆσαι*, *νοεῖν*, *νοῆμα*, *νοητός*, *νόος*) and to speaking and speech (*λέγειν*, *λόγος*, *φᾶσθαι*, *φατός*, *πεφατισμένον*, *φατίζω*). Apart from the words *λόγος* and *φᾶσθαι* this rich vocabulary is not paralleled in Melissus' verbatim fragments.¹¹

Λόγος, 'what is said', meaning 'argument' rather than 'account', occurs twice in Melissus, viz. at 30 B7(6) and B8(1). At B7(6), where he characterizes Being, we read 'pertaining to (its) being afflicted the argument is the same as for being in pain' (*περὶ τοῦ ἀνιάσθαι ὡντὸς λόγος τῷ ἀλγέοντι*). The only early parallel for the formula *ὡντὸς λόγος* is a single instance in Zeno fr. 29 B1: 'the same argument pertains to what protrudes from it' (*περὶ τοῦ προύχοντος ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος*). Next, at B8(1) Melissus, looking back to and recapitulating what came before, states: 'the above argument is the most important sign that it is one alone, but the following are signs too' (*μέγιστον μὲν οὖν σημεῖον οὗτος ὁ λόγος, ὅτι ἔν μόνον ἔστιν, ἀτὰρ καὶ τάδε σημεῖα*). Parmenides uses *σήματα* to denote the 'attributes' of Being and of the elements of the *Doxa*,¹² but Melissus uses the synonym *σημεῖα* differently, viz. in the sense of 'arguments' (the term only occurs in fr. 30 B8).

In Parmenides the term *λόγος* occurs three times, once in the sense of 'argument' (the gentle *λόγοισιν* that persuade *Dikē* to open the gate, 28 B1.15), once perhaps meaning 'account' rather than 'argument' (28 B8.50, 'at this point I end

⁹ Fr. 28 B1.28–30, B8.50–51.

¹⁰ Fr. 28 B1.30, B2.4, B8.12.50; cf. with the verb B8.39 *πειποθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ*. See Mourelatos (2008), 136–163.

¹¹ The cognitive verb *γινώσκειν* (not in Parmenides) occurs in the awkward phrase *ὥστε συμβαίνει μῆτε ὁρᾶν μῆτε τὰ ὄντα γινώσκειν* (30 B8(4)), probably correctly athetized by Barnes (1987), 149 as a gloss.

¹² Fr. 28 B8.22 of Being, B8.55 of the elements.

for you the persuasive account and thought'), once certainly in the sense of 'argument' 'or 'reasoning' (28 B7.5, 'judge by reasoning my much-contested proof') too, and here in a rather more pivotal location than in Melissus.

For all that we may have an important occurrence of the verb λέγειν in a sort of 'Parmenidean' sense in the first sentence of the Simplician paraphrase of fr. 30 B1 (*in Phys.* 103.13–16).¹³ Simplicius explicitly says that the treatise *began* with the phrase 'if there were nothing, what could be said (λέγοιτο) of it as if it were something that is?' Burnet and Reale have argued that this rhetorical question is a genuine fragment,¹⁴ and though I hesitate to accept that the quotation is *ad litteram*, it seems safe to assume that it reproduces something Melissus really wrote. It constitutes the most important epistemological reflection to be found in his remains. Yet the distinction between non-Being and Being is here given rather than argued for, and succinctly presented as a *fait accompli*. The clarification one needs is supplied in what immediately follows in Simplicius' paraphrase, and is also extant in the close parallel in Philoponus' account of Melissus' argument.¹⁵ Both Simplicius and Philoponus, with Aristotle's famous characterization of the material cause attributed to the physicists in mind ('they think nothing is either generated or destroyed, since this sort of entity is always preserved'¹⁶), state – Simplicius even does so twice – that Melissus availed himself of the (ontological) principle of the physicists, which shows that what we have at this point is interpretation and elaboration rather than paraphrase.

In the verbatim fragments too we no longer find a necessary connection of Being with thinking as in Parmenides, but only one with 'saying' (φᾶσθαι), less private and more public than thinking. This seems to be encapsulated in the formula 'just like I [sc. Melissus] say (ἐγὼ φημι) that the One is' (30 B8(2)), already quoted above.¹⁷ But what 'we say', expressed by the same verb, or 'believe' (φάμεν, B8(2)), about reality as humans, or what men in general 'say', or 'believe' (φασὶν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, B8(2), φαμένοις B8(4)), turns out to apply to, or imply, non-Being and so is mistaken. For if true it would entail that 'what-is did perish and what-is-not has come into being' (τὸ μὲν ἐδὼν ἀπώλετο, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἐδὼν γέγονεν, B8(6)). This core ingredient of Parmenides' distinction between Being and non-Being still determines the argument in the later paragraphs of Melissus' exposition.

¹³ The single instance of the verb in Zeno fr. 29 B1 is less pregnant: ὁμοιον δὴ τοῦτο ἅπαξ τε εἰπεῖν καὶ αἰεὶ λέγειν ('it is the same to say this once and to say it always').

¹⁴ Numbered *0 in Reale's edition, but see Long (1976), 647–648.

¹⁵ *Simp. in Phys.* 103.16–23 (in the apparatus in DK); *Philop. in Phys.* 51.20–52.6 (not in DK, but printed at Reale (1970), 'vita e dottrina' *10a *ad finem*, and Vitali (1973), LXXXV.)

¹⁶ See Arist. *Met.* A 3.983b6–18, cf. M 6.1062b24–26.

¹⁷ *Il.* B 129 is the only earlier parallel.

I.3

The attributes of Being deduced one after the other by Melissus are partly of direct Parmenidean descent, but there are also some to some extent new or at least revised ones. Parmenides called these attributes *σήματα*,¹⁸ but Melissus has no name for them. The arguments in favour often present an emphasis that differs from that of the Master.

That non-Being cannot come to be is argued in fr. 30 B1: ‘what was, was always, and it will always be,¹⁹ for if it came into being it necessarily was nothing before coming into being; now if it were nothing, it would in no way come to be anything from nothing’. Melissus here argues from *a* to *b* and then chiasmatically and counterfactually from *b* back to *a*: if it did come to be it was nothing, and nothing cannot come to be. Being’s eternal existence is again formulated in fr. 30 B2: ‘since it did not come into being, it is always and was always and will always be’ (ὄτε τοίνυν οὐκ ἐγένετο, ἔστι τε καὶ αἰεὶ ἦν καὶ αἰεὶ ἔσται). It has often been argued that the meaning of this formula is significantly different from that of Parmenides’ phrase ‘it [sc. Being] was not and will not be, because it is *now* (*vūn*), together, complete, one, continuous’.²⁰ This phrase as well as Parmenides’ subsequent long argument have been interpreted in different ways, a number of scholars believing that Parmenides has invented eternity (an eternal present), or timelessness,²¹ a notion with a great future, while others argue that he intends to exclude Being’s having-come-to-be at an earlier and coming-to-be at a future moment.²² However this may be, it is far from clear what exactly the ‘now’ at the beginning of the exposition of the ontology means, especially as also things in the world of the *Doxa* are said to ‘be now’ (*vūn* ἔασι) but to disappear ‘after this’ (ἀπὸ τοῦδε).²³ I believe that it is clear that Melissus is in favour, here as elsewhere, of disambiguation, and so avoids using ‘now’ in relation to Being. He replaces it with one of the possible interpretations of Parmenides’ intention, viz. the more readily comprehensible aggregate of past,²⁴ present and future, that

¹⁸ See above, I.2, text to n. 12.

¹⁹ No ἔστιν here; I do not know whether this is significant.

²⁰ Fr. 28 B8.4–5, ἐπεὶ νῦν ἔστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν, / ἔν, συνεχές.

²¹ E.g., Guthrie (1965), 29–30, Owen (1966), Kirk, Raven and Schofield (1983), 250 n. 1, Mourelatos (2008), 105–107, Coxon (2009), 315–316.

²² E.g., Schofield (1970), Gallop (1984), 13–14, O’Brien (1987a), 35, and (1987b). Whittaker (1971) argues that the text of fr. 28 B8.5 is insecure and (p. 24) that one may conclude with confidence that ‘the doctrine of non-durational eternity, which Neoplatonists associated with both versions of the line, was not taught by the historical Parmenides’.

²³ Fr. B19.2–3, οὐτω τοι κατὰ δόξαν ἔφην τάδε καὶ νῦν ἔασι / καὶ μετέπειτ’ ἀπὸ τοῦδε τελευτήσουσι τραφέντα.

²⁴ Cf. the past of Being in fr. 30 B7(2), τὸ πρόσθεν ἑόν, and B7(3), ὁ κόσμος ὁ πρόσθεν ἑόν.

is, with *all time* in the sense of everlastingness, an idea already found with Heraclitus.²⁵ For what has not come into being and will not perish (as Parmenides argued is the case with Being) can also be imagined as always existing. That Melissus really means ‘*all time*’ is proved by fr. 30 B7(2), the words ἐν τῷ παντί χρόνῳ,²⁶ by the denotation of the word αἰδιον in fr. B4 and B7(1),²⁷ and by the expression αἰε εἶναι at B7(4) and B8(2). He only uses νῦν at fr. 30 B8(3) in its commonplace sense in relation to the phenomena of experience: ‘what was and what (is) now (ὅ τι ἦν καὶ ὁ νῦν)’.

Now it is precisely this closer-to-us conception of Being-at-all-time that entails other revisionary interpretations of Parmenides’ ontological arguments, or at least allows for them. For from the fact that Being has not come into being and so is present at all time Melissus derives the conclusion that it has ‘neither a beginning nor an end’ (ἀρχὴν οὐκ ἔχει οὐδὲ τελευτήν), a formula that occurs twice in fr. 30 B2 and is repeated in a slightly different version in fr. 30 B4 as ἀρχὴν τε καὶ τέλος. In fr. 30 B2 it is supported, twice again, by forms of the verbs with the same roots: ‘If it had come into being, it would have a beginning (since it would then have begun, ἤρξατο) and an end (for what comes to be must end, ἐτελεύτησε(ν) ἄν)’. Reiterations such as these are a staple ingredient of archaic prose and poetry.

Parmenides uses the triplet ἔφν (equivalent, I believe, to Melissus’ ἤρξατο) / ἔασι / τελευτήσουσι (the same verbs as in Melissus) for past, present and future.²⁸ He connects these three verbs with the generated and perishable things of the world of the Doxa, and on this occasion applies the idea of the fullness of time to a limited period only.

The formula closest to Melissus’ ἀρχὴν οὐκ ἔχει οὐδὲ τελευτήν is Parmenides’ phrase ‘it [sc. Being] is beginningless and ceaseless’ (ἔστιν ἀναρχον

²⁵ For Heraclitus see fr. 22 B30, κόσμον τόνδε, τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ’ ἦν αἰεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται (‘was always and is and will be’) πῦρ ἀεὶζῶν κτλ. Also see Anaxagoras fr. 59 B12 καὶ ὅποια ἐμελλεν ἔσσεσθαι καὶ ὅποια ἦν, ἅσσα νῦν μὴ ἔστι, καὶ ὅσα νῦν ἔστι καὶ ὅποια ἔσται κτλ. (‘how it was to be and how was what is not now, as well as what is now and how it will be’). For ‘all time’ cf. also Emp. fr. 31 B16 (reading at the beginning uncertain) ἢ γὰρ καὶ πάρος ἦν τε καὶ ἔσσεται (‘they were in the past and will be as well’), οὐδὲ ποτ’, οἶω, / τούτων ἀμφοτέρων κενεώσεται ἄσπετος αἰὼν (‘endless time’), and B21.13, ἐκ τούτων γὰρ πάνθ’ ὅσα τ’ ἦν ὅσα τ’ ἔστι καὶ ἔσται. The first of the five reasons in favour of infinity summarized by Aristotle at *Phys.* 3.4.203b15–30 is infinity of time, ἐκ ... τοῦ χρόνου (οὗτος γὰρ ἄπειρος).

²⁶ This is the only occurrence of the substantive χρόνος in Melissus. It is not found in Parmenides (unless one accepts χρόνος at fr. 28 B8.36, defended by Coxon (2009) *ad loc.* and 210–211, followed by Sedley (1999), 120), Anaxagoras, or Diogenes of Apollonia, but occurs twice in Empedocles: fr. 31 B110.8, περιπλομένοιο χρόνοιο, and 115.7, διὰ χρόνου. The locution is paralleled at Thuc. 1.33.2, Plu. *Def.* 433F, *CN* 1077C.

²⁷ The third occurrence, αἰδία in fr. 30 B8(4) was doubted by Gomperz, followed by DK; accepted by, e.g., Reale and Vitali. αἰδιον occurs at Emp. fr. 31 B115, Diog. Ap. fr. 64 B7 and B8.

²⁸ At fr. 28 B19.1–2 the Goddess says ‘thus these things came to be and are now and will cease after this’ (οὕτω ... ἔφν τάδε καὶ νῦν ἔασι / καὶ μετέπειτ’ ἀπὸ τοῦδε τελευτήσουσι).

ἄπανστος) in the Alētheia section.²⁹ As an *interpretation* of Parmenides' statements about coming to be and passing away Melissus' new formula concerned with all time is entirely legitimate, although, as we have seen, it is not the only possible one. Typically, Melissus again argues from *a* to *b* and then counterfactually back from *b* to *a*. We shall encounter further examples of this chiasmic type of reasoning with its roots in the traditions of oral performance, for instance in fr. 30 B7. The present instance irritated Aristotle, as we shall see in Part II below.

According to Melissus the absence of both beginning and end has to mean that Being is 'unlimited' (ἄπειρόν, fr. 30 B3).³⁰ As we know this is not a Parmenidean thought at all, for Parmenides' Being 'is situated in the *limits* (πεῖρασι) of great chains', and 'since there is a final *limit* (πεῖρας πύματον), it is like the mass of a concentric ball'.³¹ Melissus revises this notion. Parmenides' description of Being as having a sphere-like form and as being located inside limits, or 'as remaining in the same state it lies by itself, and so remains fixed there' ('on the spot', αὐθι) suggests that it is somewhere specific, that is, that it occupies a definite place or space (in fact, all available space if the limit is ultimate). It has generally been seen as a problem that Melissus' Being is not only unlimited as to time, but is also 'always unlimited in size' (μέγεθος)³² as stated in fr. 30 B3, for how did he manage to prove this?³³ It seems that he believed that one way of being unlimited entails being unlimited in another way as well, which is a bit hard to gauge. I assume (but do not insist) that the spatial aura of Parmenides' Being-within-limits is one of the factors that prompted Melissus to move from unlimited being in unlimited time to unlimited being in unlimited space, his revision of the temporal aspect helping to bring along the spatial aspect. This too is an issue I shall return to.

It anyhow seems that arguing in favour of spatial infinity was of special interest to him. The point is driven home in fr. 30 B4, a back-to-front version of the argument of fr. 30 B2: 'nothing that has a beginning and end is either eternal (αἰδιδον) or unlimited'.

²⁹ Fr. 28 B8.27.

³⁰ The term ἄπειρος in relation to size occurs also in Zeno's dialectical arguments: fr. B1 infinite size (μεγάλα δὲ ὅστε ἄπειρα εἶναι), fr. 29 B3 infinite division. Anaxagoras used the concept of infinity in several ways, see below, III.1, text to n. 4.

³¹ Fr. 28 B8.26, B8.43–44.

³² The word μέγεθος is not found in Parmenides, but occurs several times in Zeno: fr. 29 B1 and B2; for his use of the idea of infinite size see above, n. 30.

³³ Cherniss (1935), 69–73 attempts to construct an argument for Melissus and *ibid.*, 70 argues that 'time and space are two complementary dimensions in which all process occurs'; see also Verdenius (1948), 8–10. Vlastos (1953) plus additional note in the repr. unsuccessfully argues that only temporal infinity is meant. Owen (1960), 67, at some cost to the interpretation of Parmenides, argues that Melissus follows Parmenides 'without reservation'. Barnes (1979), 181 speaks of 'an analogous argument' but does not spell this out. Rapp (1997), 166 wonders whether we only have an analogy. Sedley (1999), 127 argues that 'a process of generation, ..., being temporally bounded, could only have generated a spatially finite being'.

From Being's unlimitedness it next follows that it is 'one' in the sense of one in number, or single, or alone: 'as it is unlimited, it must be *one* (ἓν); for if there were *two* (δύο) they could not be unlimited, but would have limits (πείρατα) against each other' (fr. 30 B6).³⁴ Or, as fr. 30 B5 has it, with the argument reversed in the typically chiasmic way characteristic of literature with an oral background: 'if it were not one, it would be limited against something else'.³⁵ It is true that 'one' (ἓν, 28 B8.6) is also one of the attributes (σήματα) of Parmenides' Being, but in Melissus the emphasis is stronger and different, as has been generally appreciated.^{35a} Parmenides' Being moreover is also characterized as the 'only member of its kind' (μονογενής),³⁶ which leaves room for the possibility that there are other entities, of a different kind. And in fact such entities do appear in Parmenides' poem: the physical elements, posited by erring humans, of which there are 'two, ... one of which is not necessarily' (μορφὰς ... δύο / τῶν μίαν οὐ χρεῶν ἔστιν).³⁷ The relations of these two 'Forms' to the one Being and the precise meaning or nature of the mistake made by humans are difficult if not impossible to fathom, as the various efforts by modern scholars demonstrate. Fortunately I do not have to enter into this issue here, and may limit myself to the observation that Melissus simply avoids the problem by declaring, in a phrase that anticipates a variation of George Orwell's famous formula: one is good and two is wrong – and thus by adhering to 'one'.

What causes a surprise is not that Eudemus could easily maintain that an entity can still be unlimited even when bordering on another one, as does the past when abutting on the present.³⁸ What may really surprise is that Melissus failed to take Xenophanes' doctrine into account that the earth is limited at its upper side, but unlimited in the other direction.³⁹ But presumably this did not count for him, because it is about the world of experience he rejected.

The deduction of the next attribute, 'wholly homogenous' (ὁμοιον πᾶν), has

³⁴ The fourth of the five reasons for the assumption of infinity summarized by Aristotle at *Phys.* 3.4.203b15–30 is that what is limited is always limited against another thing, ἔτι πῶ τὸ πεπερασμένον αἰεὶ πρὸς τι περαίνειν, ὅστε ἀνάγκη μηδὲν εἶναι πέρας, εἰ αἰεὶ περαίνειν ἀνάγκη ἕτερον πρὸς ἕτερον.

³⁵ This inversion is in favour of reversing the order of these two fragments.

^{35a} Rapp (2013a) is very clear about the difficulty of relating Zeno's paradoxes about plurality to the ontological argument of Parmenides, whose monism according to Plato was defended by Zeno, while the term ἓν, occurring once only and only as an adjective, merely plays a subordinate part in the poem. His elegant solution (2.555) is that Parmenides may well have been 'wahrgenommen' (perceived, interpreted) as a numerical monist. He does not, however, mention this point in his interpretation of Melissus, for whom this is perhaps even more relevant. Rapp's suggestion is supported by the fact that according to Parmenides 28 B8.12–3 DK there can be *no other* Being next to Being, while according to B8.42–9 there is only a *single* sphere of Being.

³⁶ Fr. 28 B8.4. This is the reading of the majority of our sources, over against Plutarch's (and DK's) οὐλομελής, and has come to be preferred.

³⁷ Fr. 28 B8.53–54.

³⁸ Fr. 41 Wehrli *ap. Simp. in Phys.* 110.5–11 (see at Melissus fr. 30 B5), criticizing this fragment of Melissus. Cf., e.g., also Chrysippus on time, *SVF* 2.509 (Arius Didymus fr. 26 Diels).

³⁹ Fr. 21 B28.

not been transmitted verbatim,⁴⁰ but the attribute itself, listed at the beginning of fr. 30 B7(1), is certainly authentic and has ample precedent in Parmenides.⁴¹ A whole further series of attributes follows, each of which is proved:⁴² as Being is homogeneous it does not become different so is not destroyed, does not become larger, is not rearranged, does not suffer pain, and does not suffer distress. We note that not all these attributes are anticipated in Parmenides.

In the majority of proofs the distinction between Being and non-Being or ‘nothing’ constitutes the basis for the argument, and several attributes entail another one. Change means that Being is not homogeneous, that what was before is destroyed, and what is not comes to be (*quod non*, as is proved in fr. 30 B2 and B3). ‘If it were to become different by one hair⁴³ in ten thousand years, it would wholly perish in the whole of time’. In Parmenides change is excluded implicitly rather than explicitly, as the word ἀκίνητόν seems to pertain in the first place to movement.⁴⁴ Rearrangement – not spelled out in Parmenides – is excluded, as the earlier ‘orderly arrangement’ (κόσμος) is not destroyed, and an arrangement that is not does not come to be. But that nothing is either added or taken away echoes Parmenides’ claim that Being cannot become larger or smaller.⁴⁵

That Being feels neither pain nor stress is a remarkable innovation compared with Parmenides, and calls to mind the arguments against the thesis that God(s) exist(s) for ever formulated several centuries later by Carneades: what perceives feels pain, what feels pain changes, what changes perishes in the end.⁴⁶ I believe the point is polemical: Melissus wishes to exclude that Being should be thought to be alive, or divine, in contrast to the principles of the early philosophers of nature, the divine status of which has been so successfully brought to our attention by Werner Jaeger more than sixty years ago.⁴⁷ This refusal to accord sentience to Being is analogous to the decision to deprive the presentation of Being of a dramatic and divine apparatus like that imagined by Parmenides. Everything should be as low-key as possible.

The final section of the fragment is devoted to the explicit denial of the existence of a *void* (κενέον), ‘for the void is nothing, and what is nothing cannot be’. This is new and goes quite a bit farther than Parmenides’ claim that ‘it [sc.

⁴⁰ The argument may be extant at [Arist.] *MXG* 1.974a12–14: to be inhomogeneous is to be several, not one.

⁴¹ Fr. 28 B8.5.22.47.

⁴² Note that the order of the proofs is not the same as that of the epithets in the announcement.

⁴³ See LSJ v. θριξ II.2.

⁴⁴ Cf. Parmenides fr. 28 B8.26.

⁴⁵ Fr. 28 B8.44–45.

⁴⁶ Sext. Emp. *M.* 9.139–147.

⁴⁷ Jaeger (1947). This attitude is not contradicted by the curious note at Diog. Laert. 9.24, ‘he said one should avoid making pronouncements about the gods, as there is no knowledge of them’ (ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ θεῶν ἔλεγε μὴ δεῖν ἀποφάνεσθαι, μὴ γὰρ εἶναι γνῶσιν αὐτῶν), of which Gérard Journée reminds me.

Being] is entirely full (ἔμπλεόν) of being', where one can only find an implicit denial of the void if one already has a concept of 'void'.⁴⁸ This denial is followed by the familiar Parmenidean claim that Being does not move.⁴⁹ In Parmenides Being's immobility is derived from its immunity against coming to be and destruction,⁵⁰ but in Melissus immobility is derived from Being's plenitude (πλέων ἐστίν: the inherited Parmenidean attribute returns by the back door). Everything is full, so there is no someplace to withdraw towards. The argument is first formulated in a positive and then repeated in a negative mode: 'if a void existed it would withdraw to it, but as the void does not exist there is no place to which it can withdraw'. Plenitude moreover excludes its being 'dense' and 'rare' (πυκνόν and ἀραιόν). In Parmenides too plenitude is bound up with 'being neither more here nor less there',⁵¹ but the different terms chosen by Melissus undoubtedly echo attributes of the two elements of the Parmenidean Doxa, one of which is ἀραιόν (glossed as ἐλαφρόν, or the other way round)⁵² while the other is πυκνόν.⁵³ The rare moreover is 'emptier' (κενεώτερον) than the dense (and emptiness, or void, as has been argued, does not exist), for

the following distinction (κρίσιν) must be made: between full and not full: if it withdraws at all or receives something, it is not full; if it neither withdraws nor receives, it is full. Accordingly, if the void does not exist it has of necessity to be full. Accordingly, if it is full, it does not move.

In Parmenides the κρίσις pertains to the fundamental distinction between 'it is or it is not',⁵⁴ in Melissus it addresses that between full and not full. This again shows that the emphasis has shifted from the foundations of cognition to a description of Being as a thing. The argument of the final section, fr. 30 B7(7)–(10), constitutes a ring composition, for the conclusion that Being does not move because it is full (B7(10)) is also found as a premise at its beginning (B7(7)). The author (or orator) really wants his audience to retain his points.

Two more fragments, brief ones, also belong in the context of the attributes of Being: fr. 30 B9, which tells us that, 'being infinite and one, it cannot have a body (σῶμα)', and fr. 30 B10, which tells us that 'Being is indivisible, for if divisible it would move (εἰ γὰρ διήρηται, φησί, τὸ ἐόν, κινεῖται), but if it moves it cannot be [*quod non*]'. The latter fragment takes up one of the attributes of Parmenides' Being: 'it is not divisible, since it is wholly homogenous'.⁵⁵ The

⁴⁸ Fr. 28 B8.24.

⁴⁹ Fr. 28 B8.4.26–31.

⁵⁰ Fr. 28 B8.26–28.

⁵¹ Fr. 28 B8.23–24.

⁵² These adjectives are already found in Homer. Verdenius (1948) argues that we should keep both and delete ἤπιον at the beginning of the line.

⁵³ Fr. 28 B8.57.59. These opposites are also found at Anaxagoras fr. 59 B12 and B15.

⁵⁴ Fr. 28 B8.15–16.

⁵⁵ Fr. 28 B8.22.

difficult fr. 30 B9, which does not echo a Parmenidean attribute, will be discussed in Part III below.

I shall end with fr. 30 B8, which has already been cited before. It contains ‘further signs (σημεῖα) that it is one alone’, these signs being a series of arguments demonstrating that there is no plurality (πολλά).⁵⁶ The argument begins and ends with the same claim, which the first time is explicitly the author’s point, the second time the objective end result: B8(2), ‘For if there were many things, they should be such as *I* say that the One is’, and B8(6), ‘if there were many things, they have to be such as the One is’. We have encountered other examples of this type of ring composition.

Obviously, *many* things cannot be *one single* thing, and certainly not a single thing like the one Being. But Melissus, unlike Zeno, does not manipulate the logical contradictions between ‘one’ and ‘many’, but provides arguments against our human experience of and possible reasons for our belief in the reality of plurality (fr. 30 B8):

‘For if earth and water and air and fire exist, and iron and gold, and what is alive as distinguished from what is dead, and black and white, and all the other things of which humans say that they are real/true (ὄσα φασὶν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἀληθῆ)⁵⁷ – if these things do exist and we see and hear correctly, then each of them should be such as it seemed to us the first time, and it should not turn into its opposite or become different, but each thing should always be such as it is.

Well, we say that we see and hear and understand (: combine’, συνιέναι) correctly. (3) But it seems to us that what is hot becomes cold and what is cold becomes hot, that hard becomes soft and soft hard, that what is alive dies and is born from what is not alive, and that all these things become different, and that what was and what is now are in no respect similar, but that iron, though it is hard, is rubbed away because it touches the finger, and so is gold and stone and everything that seems to be strong, (and it seems to us) that from water earth and stone come to be.⁵⁸ (4) The original claim and the facts do not agree with each other. For though we said that there are many eternal things having (stable) forms, and (having) strength, it seems to us that they all become different and that opposites come to be from what is seen each time. (5) It is therefore clear that we did not see correctly and that these things do not correctly seem to be many, for they would not come to be from their opposites, if they were real/true, for then each thing would (still) be such as it seemed to be. For nothing is stronger than real/true Being. (6) But if they came to be from opposites, (a) Being has perished and (b) non-Being has come to be. Accordingly, if there would be many things, they have to be such as the One is’.

⁵⁶ *Toto coelo* different from Zeno’s arguments against πολλά in fr. 29 B2 and B3.

⁵⁷ Cf. Parm. fr. 28 B8.39, ὄσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ; see below, n. 60 and text thereto.

⁵⁸ Deleting the phrase [; so it follows that we neither see nor get to know the things that are]. For the brackets see above, I.2, n. 11.

It has been seen by scholars that this argument is indebted to Parmenides' lines about humans ($\beta\text{ποτοί}$) being wrong in trusting that things they merely give a name to do really come to be and pass away, and are-as-well-as-not, and change place, and alter colour.⁵⁹ It is also indebted to the Goddess' advice to the poet not to be induced 'by custom to direct a purposeless eye and echoing ear' along the road she wants him to avoid.⁶⁰ But it goes quite a bit farther, because the list of objects or processes that do not in fact exist (or meet the conditions for true being) is longer, and more various and detailed. It comprises more or less scientific examples (the four elements, cyclical change) as well as at a first glance more homely ones (the iron ring that is worn away).

The explicit claim that something must be like the one Being if it is to exist is also new. It is true that in Parmenides the two elements of the *Doxa* share important attributes with Being: each of them is identical with itself, while together they constitute a plenum.⁶¹ But they are not immobile or indivisible. The many things observed by humans should *ex hypothesi* be exempt from coming to be and being destroyed, or change in time, or being divisible. They should remain what and as they are right from the start, which in our experience they undeniably do not, as they come to be and change and fall to pieces and disappear. So either the ontological claim or our experience must be at fault, and Melissus feels bound to opt for the abandonment of experience.

In Part III I shall try to answer the question of whether some of his arguments in this fragment are directed against certain views of other philosophers of nature.

⁵⁹ Fr. 28 B8.38–41. Changing place and altering colour may in the first place pertain to heavenly phenomena, see Mansfeld (2005), 558–559.

⁶⁰ Fr. 28 B7.3–5. For the position of humans ($\alpha\text{νθρωποί}$ or $\beta\text{ποτοί}$) in Parmenides cf. 28 B1.27.30, B6.4, B8.51.61, B16.2.3 and B19.3; for that of Ἕλληνας in Anaxagoras fr. 68 B11.

⁶¹ Fr. 28 B8.57–57 compared with B8.29–31; B9.34.

Il dibattito

Ruminations on Mansfeld's Melissus¹

Patricia Curd

Jaap Mansfeld's lectures on Melissus are a pleasure to read and to think about; as he points out, Melissus is too often over-looked and under-rated. The lectures contain useful discussions about why this has happened, and especially helpful is the treatment of Melissus in the ancient world. Here I respond to Mansfeld in the best way I can: by exploring some of the questions and ideas that were raised for me while working through 'Melissus Between Miletus and Elea'. These are problems about time, about the nature of the One and the body problem of B9, and Melissus' place in the development of Post-Parmenidean Presocratic philosophical inquiry. I accept that it is crucial that we not elide Melissus and Parmenides, or to treat Zeno as having views that are, as a matter of course, the same as or parallel to those of either.² Melissus is a serious thinker, whose views are meant to be taken seriously, and not an unimaginative (and bad) popularizer of the more thoughtful Parmenides. It may be that 'it is not such a good sign that every so often [Melissus] is believed to be in need of rehabilitation' (Mansfeld, 72), but that is, I think, less a signal of a problem with Melissus himself than it is a not-so-good sign of the stubbornness of modern scholars in clinging to older views.³

A look at the relevant texts makes it clear that Parmenides and Melissus make different claims about what-is. As Mansfeld says, 'The attributes of Being deduced one after the other by Melissus are partly of direct Parmenidean descent, but there are also some to some extent new or at least revised ones... The arguments in favour often present an emphasis that differs from that of the Master' (77). The question is what to make of the differences. An obvious case, mentioned by almost everyone, is

¹ My thanks to the editor for asking me to be a part of this project; I especially thank him for his patience. I have learned much from Jaap Mansfeld's discussion of Melissus, just as I am always enriched by thinking about Mansfeld's work.

² This is important, I think, whether or not we suppose that ancient thinkers, Plato (for instance) conflates the views of Parmenides, Melissus, and Zeno (as I think he does, for his own purposes in both Parts I and II of the *Parmenides*). Where we have independent texts, we need not accept that Parmenides (or Zeno) held a view just because Plato asserts that this is so. In what follows, for reasons of brevity, I ignore the [Aristotle] *MXG*.

³ Consider how long it has taken for non-specialist scholars' complacency about the incompatibility between Empedocles' so-called religious and philosophical views to be shaken up, or for philosophers to give up the assumption that *real* philosophy starts with Socrates. The periodic 'rehabilitations' may also be related to a desire to produce revolutionary new and radically improved interpretations, when it may well be that most interpretations produce incremental progress.

that of time.⁴ In the opening lines of 28 B8 Parmenides states the ‘signs’ along the way that it is (characteristics that point out how what-is is):

... a single account still remains of the route that it is: and on this there are very many signs, how what-is is ungenerable and imperishable, a whole of a single kind, unshaking and complete; nor was it nor will it be, inasmuch as it is now, all together one, cohesive. (οὐδέ ποτ’ ἦν οὐδ’ ἔσται, ἐπεὶ νῦν ἔστιν ὁμοῦ πᾶν ἓν, συνεχές)

Parmenides’ language puzzles. Is Parmenides claiming that what-is is outside of time, hence, past and future make no sense for it, because for what-is it is always only ‘now’?⁵ Melissus, too, denies coming-to-be and passing away to what-is (30 B1 DK); he reasserts this in expanding on the denial in B2, but his vocabulary differs from that of Parmenides: ‘Since it did not come into being, it is always, it was always, and will always be (ὅτι τοίνυν οὐκ ἐγένετο, ἔστι τε καὶ ἀεὶ ἦν καὶ ἀεὶ ἔσται)’ (30 B2 DK; see B1, B3, B4). Melissus’ eschewal of *now* (νῦν) and his repeated use of *always* (ἀεὶ) in his account of the One has seemed not only a difference from Parmenides but an improvement in Melissus’ view. Some have wanted to say that there is a different conception of time and temporality at work in the two theories. (Palmer, e.g., says that ‘Parmenides denied the applicability of temporal predicates to what is’ while Melissus attributes to it sempiternality, or everlastingness.⁶) Mansfeld is cautious, saying only that Melissus’ claims are perhaps clearer than those of Parmenides: ‘Melissus is in favour, here as elsewhere, of disambiguation’ and so avoids using *now*, substituting a notion of everlastingness as in Heraclitus B30; Mansfeld adds references to Anaxagoras (59 B12) and to Empedocles (31 B16 and B21.13; 77-78 and n. 25). I do not wish to enter the discussion about the theoretical underpinnings of Parmenides’ and Melissus’ conceptions of time and what-is, for I do not think that this is a particularly fruitful way to think about the Presocratics. After all, a theory of time is hardly to be found in Plato, and the discussion really begins with Aristotle: in both the *Timaeus* and the *Physics*, time is clearly connected with change.⁷ As neither Parmenides nor Melissus attribute change to what genuinely is (and Melissus denies that there is anything at all other than the One), the Platonic and Aristotelian accounts have no specific relevance to their views.⁸ I am not claiming that neither Parmenides nor Melissus had a view about time (and certainly would not assert that they were incapable of having a theoretical conception of time), but I do suggest that extracting, concentrating on, and overcomplicating the temporal claims might make us miss something else but related about how they (and

⁴ That difference is noticed need not mean it is necessarily properly appreciated. Palmer (2003, 2004) has collected a number of such cases.

⁵ See Barnes (1979 chapter X) for an attempt to analyze an argument here. Schofield (1970) gives a good account of the views at the time. A clear and helpful account is in McKirahan (2008), 205-208.

⁶ Palmer (2004), 26; (2009), 205-06.

⁷ See Osborne (1996), esp. 194-196; Johansen (2004), Coope (2005).

⁸ Does any Presocratic have a theoretical view of time? Anaxagoras (in discussions of both *Nous* and original mixture) and Empedocles (with the cycles and the development of living things) both seem to assume certain basic temporal notions, but neither really examines them.

especially Melissus) conceived of what-is. This is what I concentrate on in the remainder of this note.

Mansfeld's references to Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, and Empedocles are intriguing in this context, for they suggest another way of thinking about how Melissus characterizes the One, and another reason for why Melissus says what he says and the way he says it about non-coming-to-be and non-passing-away. Heraclitus B30 claims that 'the ordered world, the same for all, no one of gods nor men made but always was, is, and will be, fire ever living, being kindled in measures and being extinguished in measures (κόσμον τόνδε τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν ἄλλ' ἦν αἰεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ αἰεὶζῶν ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα)'. The language here, along with that in other Heraclitus fragments, including 22 B50, B41, B32, and B64 invoke both the traditional and the new (philosophical) language of divinity: being that which neither comes-to-be nor passes away and endures is one of the marks of the divine.⁹ It is not, I think, shocking to suggest that Parmenides links what-is and divinity because of how what-is is (I argue for this in other places); this is a notion that actually supports linking Xenophanes and Parmenides (rather than through appeals to monism of some kind). What strikes me now is that, just as Empedocles thought of the forces of Love and Strife and the roots as themselves divine in some way (hence the language of B16, B17, and B21), and just as Anaxagoras thinks of *Nous* as satisfying requirements for divinity, Melissus too, *may* have attributed divinity to the One.¹⁰ This is a place where I part company with Mansfeld's interpretation; yet the account I suggest is based on and stimulated by claims that he makes about Melissus and his views. Mansfeld's stimulating account of Melissus moved me to think about how Melissus might fit into a discussion of divinity in ancient Greek philosophy. What I am about to suggest is clearly speculative, and here I can do no more than gesture at how an argument might go. If what I suggest is right, then we might be able to say more about Melissus' place in the development of philosophical thought. If Melissus indeed thought of his One Being as divine, that fact may help to shed some light on what strike me (and others) as the two most obvious oddities in Melissus' claims.

Oddity A: the One is unlimited in *megethos* (B3); nevertheless it has no body (B9).

Oddity B: the One suffers neither pain nor affliction.

To begin, I should note that the notion of *divinity* I have in mind here should not be equated with the traditional Greek view of the *gods* but should rather be understood as a cluster of attributes that come from the conceptual analysis of the nature of divinity. I see (and have argued for) some of the first steps along this way being taken by Xenophanes and by Heraclitus. Xenophanes claimed that what the divine genuinely is has not been captured in traditional accounts of the gods (21 B11, B12, B14, B15, B16 DK) and his positive account provides some surprising attributes: the divine has no body, does not change in any way, and controls the cosmos by its

⁹ Fuller arguments, Curd (2013, 2010, 2009).

¹⁰ Anaxagoras: 59 A48 DK. Empedocles 31 B17 DK especially suggests the divinity of the roots.

thought (21 B23, B24, B26, B25 DK). Xenophanes hints at the conceptual analysis behind his claims when he rejects motion as ‘inappropriate’ for the divine (21 B26 DK: αἰεὶ δ’ ἐν ταύτῳ μίμνει κινούμενος οὐδέν / οὐδὲ μετέρχεσθαι μιν ἐπιτρέπει ἄλλοτε ἄλλῃ). In a similar way, Heraclitus treats the entire cosmos as a divinity: it is always, and is self-controlling through the *logos* which contains the principles of intelligibility. In both Xenophanes and Heraclitus, the divine is co-extensive with the cosmos.¹¹ So what has all this to do with the two great oddities?

Melissus asserts that what-is must be unlimited, and I accept Mansfeld’s claim that this entails that it must be unlimited in size/extent (μέγεθος). If what-is is always (B3) and we take this to mean at every ‘when’ (in the minimal sense of B2 above), then it is reasonable to accept that it is every ‘where’ as well; for being here but not somewhere else could be thought to mark a limit where there can be none. Thus, what-is extends unlimitedly. In this aspect (but not, of course in others), Melissus’ One is like the original mixture of Anaxagoras, and as with that mixture, it makes little sense to speak of it as having a *shape* even though it extends everywhere.¹² That mixture is the unlimited expanse on which *Nous* operates. Melissus seems to conceive of the One in a similar fashion: it is the unlimited expanse of what-is. What-is has just the characteristics (or is in just the ways) that Melissus deduces for it from an analysis of what it is to be the sort of thing that what-is is (and of course, there is no separate *nous* or anything else). This unlimited expanse of Being just is the One. This is what I take Mansfeld to mean when he claims that there is no ‘contradiction between having ‘size’, or extension, and not having a ‘body’ (99), and parses that in terms of figure or shape in the mathematical sense.¹³ In this way, Melissus can seem to be situated, as it were, between Xenophanes/Heraclitus and Anaxagoras. The key is being without limits. Melissus B9 has elicited various responses, as Mansfeld shows, mostly because of the supposed exoticism of the claim that what-is has no body and no thickness.¹⁴ While I am happy to follow Mansfeld in the explanation of why there is no contradiction here, I want to push things further.

Both Renehan and Palmer explained the ‘no body’ claim on the grounds that Melissus rejects the idea that the One is like a living animal or human being. This allows them, as Mansfeld notes, to reject both Oddity A and Oddity B in one fell swoop. Mansfeld finds the single fell swoop disappointing and notes the distinctness of the treatments of A and B in Melissus’ text. Yet what Mansfeld’s view shares with this account is consent to the notion that the One is neither alive nor intelligent.

¹¹ This is not the usual view of Xenophanes’ god. (See, for instance Palmer (1998).) Again, my arguments are elsewhere: in articles already referred to and in an ongoing work in progress on divinity, intelligibility, and human thought.

¹² The comparison with Anaxagoras is, I think, helpful, even though we acknowledge that Anaxagoras’ original mixture includes stuffs. I leave undiscussed the question of the relation between Melissus and Anaxagoras, as nothing I say here depends on it.

¹³ Mansfeld helpfully reminds us that this is not a new view, just an overlooked one (see his note 24 at p. 100).

¹⁴ The ‘exoticism’ is separate from the possible contradiction with *megethos*. I think that part of what people find so odd about B9 is the separation of being and being a body or bodily, or a stuff.

Mansfeld interprets Melissus' rejection of pain and affliction as polemical, and aimed at earlier Presocratic commitments to divine principles: 'this refusal to accord sentience to Being is analogous to the decision to deprive the presentation of Being of a dramatic and divine apparatus like that imagined by Parmenides. Everything should be as low-key as possible'.¹⁵ I am not so sure. There is no direct discussion of divinity in the fragments that we have; yet there could be a low-key and non-dramatic commitment to the fundamental divinity of the One. The commitment could perhaps explain the odd comment at *Plac.* 1.7.27 that Melissus (and Zeno!) hold that 'god is the one-and-all and the only one to be eternal and infinite'. There is no direct evidence for this, but that Melissus *did not* think of the One as consistent with divinity may require more explanation than that he *did* think so. For, after all, if one were arguing against attributing divinity to the One, the mere denial of pain and affliction to the One is an odd way to do so: those seem to be such fundamentally non-divine characteristics. One might suggest that the argument against pain and affliction stems not from a rejection of the One's divine status, but from a positive commitment to its divinity, as divinity is properly to be understood.¹⁶ Yes, Melissus might say, the One is divine, and is aware, but recall Xenophanes' claim in B25 that the divine directs (shakes) all things 'utterly without toil (*ἀπάνευθε πόνωτο*)'. Xenophanes, too, denies body to the divine (or so I have argued). Whether a Xenophanean-like non-bodily omni-awareness is consistent with the other attributes of the One remains to be investigated. (For instance, what interpretation would Melissus give of Parmenides 28 B3 or B8. 34-36 DK?)

This places Melissus more in the mainstream of Presocratic philosophers. I take Mansfeld's view that Melissus' targets and audience are other thinkers like himself (i.e. philosophers), rather than ordinary people, to be exactly right. Yet, there is indeed a difference between Melissus and the others: he accepts the divinity of what is but denies that this divinity controls the cosmos either directly or indirectly. There can be no cosmos that is real, for a cosmos is an arrangement that changes. Moreover, insofar as there can be no connection between the One and a phenomenal world, there can be no justification for human beliefs through their grounding in the divine (something that Heraclitus and others seem to be working toward). Melissus' philosophical tough-mindedness is revealed in B8: anything that is other than the One, must be just like the One; but that means nothing other than the One is.

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¹⁵ Mansfeld, 81.

¹⁶ Why does Melissus not make more fuss about divinity? It might be that, by his time, there is a core philosophical view of divinity (as developed in Xenophanes and Heraclitus) that he could take for granted (as perhaps Anaxagoras does if he takes *Nous* to be divine, and which may be also be at work in Empedocles). Melissus' distaste for Parmenidean drama might be playing a role at this stage.

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La replica del Prof. Mansfeld:

Some Comments on Comments

The formula of the volumes published in the *Eleatica* series, in which the text of the *Lectures* is followed by critical comments to which the lecturer is encouraged to react, ensures that one is read by at least some people. Nevertheless I am most grateful for the time spent and the attention paid by an ennead of scholars to my attempts to make some sense of the thought of Melissus. The diversity of views, especially with regard to Parmenides but also, though to a lesser extent, to Melissus is truly remarkable. It will be obvious that in the face of this abundance of conflicting observations I cannot enter into every detail, and I also apologize in advance to those who may feel that I have failed to understand what they mean. Preference has been given to comments that directly engage my argument, or part thereof, or appear to me to take matters somewhat further. For the sake of simplicity I have chosen to discuss these contributions, from Calenda to Rossetti, in alphabetical order.

Calenda

Guido Calenda characterizes Parmenides' main idea as follows: Being is the indivisible and unlimited totality of what is, and is in fact unknowable, for all we humans are able to accomplish is to attempt to split it up and award names to the resulting quasi-fragments. These objects, constituting our conceptualization of the world, are not beings-in-themselves but mere linguistic phenomena. He compares this view to what with some latitude he calls the common view of today's scientists (which, as he says, he shares himself), namely (I translate) that the epistemological model is not the reality, and that reality itself cannot be known. Here I only have to deal with this picture of Parmenides, based on a very selective reading of the evidence.

The ontology-cum-epistemology Calenda promotes is not absurd or impossible, but it is not that of Parmenides. The hero 'betrayed' by Melissus is a straw man, for Parmenides' Being is the primary object of knowledge. Parmenides even argues that

knowledge is only possible of Being, which entails that knowledge is not only theoretically possible but also within reach. We should try to work out a correct use of language corresponding to and expressing knowledge of Being. The mistake humans make, Parmenides says, is that of confusing Being and Non-Being.

Our understanding of Melissus, I may add, is not advanced when virtually every respect in which he differs from Parmenides is interpreted, as it is here, as a debasement of the original doctrine. Take for instance the rewarding concept of the void. Even if this was borrowed from Leucippus by Melissus (we simply do not know whether this is the case or not), the very fact that he recognized its importance and then used it creatively in an argument of his own (as a counterpart to Parmenides' and his own concept of plenitude), instead of ignoring or belittling it, is worthy of praise.

Curd

Patricia Curd interestingly argues in favour of attributing divine status to Melissus' One Being, something I tried to argue against. This is an attractive thought, because, as she says, Melissus would in this respect then join the majority of Early Greek philosophers. It is certainly true that the description of the One, according to which 'it did not come into being, but always is, was, and will be', strongly resembles the sort of attributes that became rather commonplace in Greek philosophical theology. A similar argument has been proposed by Curd in earlier papers (cited in her present contribution) with regard to Parmenides' 'ungenerable and imperishable' Being, of which we learn in the poem, among other things, that 'neither was it nor will it be, inasmuch as it is only now, all together, one, cohesive'. She submits that it is unprofitable to try and distinguish these utterances of the two Eleatics from the point of view of a clear-cut theory, or clear-cut theories, of time. These views can indeed be no more, as I now see, than first adumbrations of such theories. They are, moreover, not independent, but ancillary to an overarching ontological argument.

I admit that I cannot prove that one should refuse to grant Parmenides' Being and Melissus' One Being divine status. But the arguments in favour so far fail to fully convince me. Of course Xenophanes' God is in some ways the ancestor of both Being and the One, but only, I believe, in certain respects, such as being (in some sense of the word) 'immobile' and being (in some sense of the word) 'one'. Curd moreover claims that he 'has no body' (and thus anticipates Melissus' One), deriving this from fr. 21 B14:

... but mortals believe that gods are born,
and have their [sc. the mortals'] clothes, voice and body ('build', δέμας).

Denial of birth, she argues, entails denial of voice and body, and the rejection of theriomorphism etc. in frs. 21 B15 and B16 'could be expanded to exclude any particular physical attribute for the divine'.¹ We may add that fr. 21 B23 tells us that

¹ See Curd (2013), esp. 219–220.

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Indice dei nomi

- Acusilao, 85, 85n
Aezio, 49, 85, 90, 91, 92, 95n
Albertelli, P., 12, 12n, 13, 62
Alberto Magno, 10
Alcmeone, 97
Alessandro di Afrodizia, 31, 32, 55, 88n, 93, 94, 94n, 147, 148, 186
Algra, K.A., 61
Aminia, 132
Anassagora, 24, 35, 45n, 50, 52, 66, 78n, 79n, 82n, 84n, 90, 92, 93, 95, 96, 103, 103n, 105, 106, 124, 124n, 125, 125n, 126, 126n, 127n, 156, 162, 178n
Anassimandro, 33, 95, 96, 99n, 103, 106, 119n, 156, 182
Anassimene, 95, 96, 105, 106, 119n, 156, 160, 162
Antistene, 86, 88n
Apelt, O., 17, 17n, 62
Archelao, 44n
Ario Didimo, 80n, 102n
Aristarco di Samo, 16
Aristocle di Messene, 72n, 89, 90, 90n
Aristotele, 10-16, 18, 18n, 19, 20, 23-25, 29, 32, 34, 37-39, 45, 49, 50, 55, 56, 59, 72, 76, 78n, 79, 80n, 85, 85n, 87, 87n, 88, 88n, 89-91, 91n, 92-94, 96, 97, 97n, 99, 103, 103n, 106, 107, 120, 121, 124, 130, 135n, 143, 148, 150-156, 185-187, 189
Aronadio, F., 139n, 143
Balansard, A., 85n, 109
Baltussen, H., 107n, 109
Barnes, J., 17, 17n, 26, 30, 30n, 41, 62, 72, 72n, 75n, 79n, 104n, 108, 109, 124n, 128, 137n, 143
Barnouw, J., 130n, 136
Bäumker, C., 30n
Bayle, P., 11n, 62
Bergk, T., 104n, 161n, 164
Bergson, H.-L., 13, 13n, 62
Bernabé, A., 19n
Bicknell, P.J., 25, 25n, 26, 28, 33, 33n, 40, 62, 158, 164
Bonitz, H., 97n, 109
Booth, N.B., 22, 22n, 62
Bostock, D., 138n, 143
Brancacci, A., 36, 36n, 62, 121, 122
Brandis, C.A., 12, 12n, 62
Bredlow, L., 38, 38n, 62
Breglia, L., 15n, 27n, 62, 63, 109
Bremond, M., 22, 46, 46n, 62
Brisone di Eraclea, 9, 10
Brisson, L., 143, 143n
Bröcker, W., 100n, 109
Brucker, J.J., 12, 62
Burnet, J., 23, 33, 45, 47, 76, 109
Burnyeat, M., 138n, 139n, 140n, 143
Calenda, G., 51, 52, 53, 62, 115, 115n, 119n, 122, 180, 192
Calò, G., 17n, 62

- Calogero, G.*, 17n, 37, 57, 62, 162n, 164, 188
- Capelle, W.*, 12, 12n, 63
- Carneade, 81
- Casertano, G.*, 19n, 143, 143n, 193
- Centrone, B.*, 138, 138n, 139n, 143, 144
- Cerri, G.*, 19n, 132n, 136, 165n, 170n, 173
- Cherniss, H.F.*, 15, 15n, 63, 79n, 88n, 109
- Cherubin, R.*, 41, 41n, 63
- Chiappelli, A.*, 16, 16n, 17, 63, 161n, 164
- Clemente Alessandrino, 182
- Colli, G.*, 130n, 131, 131n, 133n, 136
- Colote di Lampsaco, 20, 49, 93, 154, 155
- Conone di Samo, 16
- Coope, U.*, 124n, 128
- Cordero, N.-L.*, 13, 19n, 43, 43n, 63, 108, 119n, 122, 137n, 144, 170n, 173
- Cornford, F. M.*, 101n, 102n, 109
- Covotti, A.*, 17n, 63
- Coxon, A.H.*, 73n, 77n, 78n, 108, 119n, 122, 169n, 173
- Cratilo, 35
- Crisippo, 80n, 96, 102
- Curd, P.*, 19, 36, 36n, 41, 52, 53, 63, 103n, 109, 110, 111, 123, 125n, 128, 169n, 173, 181, 181n, 182, 191, 192
- Daniele, S.*, 21n, 22, 53, 54, 63, 129, 182, 183, 192
- Dante Alighieri, 9, 10, 10n
- De Vogel, C.J.*, 60
- Democrito, 24, 25, 58, 90, 92, 97, 121, 167n, 168, 173
- Denniston, J.D.*, 107
- Di Girolamo, S.*, 54, 137, 143n, 144, 183-185, 192
- Diels, H.*, 12, 27, 32, 41, 45, 60, 61, 72n, 80n, 95, 95n, 102n, 105n, 108, 175n
- Diller, H.*, 103, 103n, 109
- Diogene di Apollonia, 24, 25, 33, 40, 78n, 103n
- Diogene Laerzio, 43n, 132, 163n
- Dover, K.*, 107
- Drozdek, A.*, 40, 40n, 63
- Eberhard, J.A.*, 12, 63
- Ecateo, 104n
- Empedocle, 24, 33, 35, 61, 78n, 86, 90, 92, 92n, 93, 95, 96n, 97, 97n, 100n, 102n, 103n, 105, 106, 123n, 124, 124n, 125, 125n, 127n, 178
- Epicarmo, 86
- Epicuro, 16, 93
- Eraclito, 35, 51, 52, 72n, 78, 78n, 86, 87n, 88n, 92, 93, 97, 103n, 104, 105, 105n, 106, 118, 124, 125, 126, 127, 127n, 160-163, 163n, 171
- Erodoto, 104n, 183
- Eschbach, A.*, 130n, 136
- Eschilo, 129, 130
- Esiodo, 85, 85n, 87n, 131
- Euclide di Megara, 9
- Eudemo, 30, 32, 48, 80, 107
- Eusebio, 33, 40
- Faraggiana di Sarzana, C.F.*, 38, 38n, 63
- Ferrari, F.*, 15, 15n, 16n, 63, 72n, 109, 138n, 139n, 140n, 144
- Filodemo di Gadara, 45, 46, 90
- Filopono, 45, 76, 94, 102
- Frère, J.*, 32, 32n, 63