

Book Reviews

Arnold Hermann. *To Think Like God: Pythagoras and Parmenides: The Origins of Philosophy*. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2004. Pp. xxx + 374. Cloth, \$32.00.

Mr. Arnold Hermann could presumably have used his connection with Parmenides Press to publish anything he wanted. Instead, he has put out a sober, bibliographically well aware, thesis about the origin, nature, and motivations of Parmenides' thought, one evolved in dialogue with scholars such as Cordero, McKirahan, and Curd. The resulting monograph, to be the first of three on subjects connected with Parmenides and Plato's *Parmenides*, is a legitimate contribution to the field, to be taken very seriously as part of any scholarly bibliography. Best of all, in this reviewer's opinion, is the exploration of Parmenides' legal language and metaphors as they might affect the type of abstract object which can count as subject for the *esti*, the differences between or among routes and rules of inquiry, the necessity for a *Doxa*-section, the relationships with Xenophanes and Plato. Less successful, I think, is the attempt to put together a coherent picture out of the hazy evidence on Pythagoras and to distinguish levels of probability within that evidence. Nor, in spite of his praise for Mourelatos's book ("... truly one of the most indispensable works on the Eleatic," 214), does Hermann seem aware (see 189) that the possibility of a pluralistic Eleatic ontology was also present in that book, before it was followed by Curd's book.

Hermann's thesis is that Parmenidean philosophy was an answer both to Xenophanes' challenge, to his indication of the limits of our human inquiry—our difference from the gods—and the problem of irrationals in Pythagoreanism. By setting out the rational limits which any purely theoretical inquiry must have, Parmenides intended to show that, in pursuing theory, we can, indeed, think like the gods. (Here excellent use is made of work by Mourelatos and Long.) But by distinguishing theoretical inquiry from empirical inquiry, Parmenides showed the limits of Pythagoreanism, which had been unable to make that distinction. (Units are theoretical entities, but points are empirical, so there are in reality no Pythagorean unit-points; rational numbers are theoretical while irrationals are empirical, and so on.) (Here there are affinities with the recent Popper book.) That is, the *Doxa*-section, according to Hermann, shows tragically that we do not *always* think like the gods, especially when we think empirically. Our contemporary science is continuing the inquiry that Parmenides began, but the original Parmenidean philosophy was a methodology about how to inquire into abstract objects, not necessarily a metaphysics, a theory about what those abstract objects are. Here Hermann differs from the standard portrait of Parmenides as theorist of an intelligible world; he thinks that it is Plato who is more responsible than Parmenides for theorizing about which objects correspond to the methodology. (Here he follows Mourelatos and Curd in viewing fragment 2 as setting up types of inquiry rather than types of entity.)

One has no quarrel with the claim that Parmenides' originality is at least partly methodological. Yet a methodology whose strictures are this strong was thought, by Plato at least, to require absolute monism; is it an accident that I cannot have a pluralistic ontology without having non-identities between members of pairs of objects, non-identity being an example of saying what is not (fragment 8, lines 36–38)? Does not this particular methodology necessitate a very particular metaphysics?

And, if we do think like the gods, at least at times, are we not then thinking about what is ultimately real, i.e., about a certain type of object? If rules can be given which secure a kind of thought which is exempt from Xenophanean scepticism, do not these rules determine sorts of entities? And, if Pythagoreanism errs in confusing theoretical with empirical entities, must not we ourselves possess the perspective of a god or goddess in order to avoid the confusion?

These are some of the questions provoked by this fresh book, which, untrammelled by much scholarly narrowness, is yet capable of contributing much to scholarly discourse and debate.

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