

## Introduction

*Anna Motta & Christopher Kurfess*

Parmenides is widely regarded as the most important and influential of the Presocratic philosophers. Born c. 515 BCE at Elea, a Greek colony in southern Italy, he is often considered to be not only the founder of Eleatic philosophy, but the father of deductive reasoning, the originator of rational theology, and the wellspring of the Western ontological tradition. The impact of Parmenides' account of Being or "what *is*" (ἐόν) on subsequent thought has been vast, lasting, and various. It is also true, as David Sedley has written, that "with Parmenides, more than with most writers, any translation is an interpretation."<sup>1</sup> Thus both the profundity of Parmenides' thought and the rich verbal density of his poetry pose challenges to modern scholars – just as they did to his ancient readers. These challenges were felt particularly keenly in later antiquity – a period of focus in the present collection of essays – when doing justice to the authority of the ancients obligated commentators to reconcile a long and complex tradition of sometimes incompatible interpretative commitments. Certain Neoplatonists (in)famously "harmonized" points of possible tension by allowing that the Presocratics, though not far from the truth, employed enigmatic and ambiguous language, whereas Plato conveyed the truth in a clearer and more appropriate way. In this manner the Presocratics, Parmenides among them, could be saved from apparent errors and their unique conceptions and terminology could be incorporated within a Neoplatonic philosophical framework.

The "Eleatic school" is commonly understood to include Parmenides, his fellow citizen Zeno, and Melissus of Samos. (Traditionally, Xenophanes of Colophon had also been included, his views about divinity seen as anticipating Parmenides' account of Being.) Parmenides and his two pupils are distin-

<sup>1</sup> "Parmenides," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1998 ed.

guished by their concern with methods of proof and for conceiving Being as a unitary substance, which is also immobile, unchangeable, and indivisible. The Eleatics began a series of reflections on the relation between demonstration and reality that eventually developed into Socratic and Platonic dialectic, and Plato's portrait has played a decisive role in the subsequent reception of Eleatic ideas. Since Plato's *Sophist*, Parmenides has been almost as famous for apparent inconsistencies as for the rigid dicta that seemed to land him in them. Moreover, in the *Parmenides*, which dramatically presents Parmenides and Zeno conversing in Athens with a very young Socrates (*Prm.* 127a–b), Plato subjects his own characteristic doctrine to critique by his Eleatic predecessors, thereby initiating a tradition of critical examination of Eleatic ontology that would last until Late Antiquity and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Plato's dialogues exhibit such a profound engagement with Eleatic thought that Eleatic ontology can be regarded as the hidden foundation of Platonic metaphysics.

Of course, Plato and the Platonic tradition are only part of the story, and the present collection seeks, with no pretense of being exhaustive, to provide a representative survey of the reception of Eleatic ontology during the Hellenistic and late ancient periods.<sup>3</sup> The essays included offer fresh perspectives on crucial points in that reception, reveal points of contact and instances of mutual interaction between competing traditions, and allow readers to reflect on the revolutionary new conceptions that thinkers of these eras developed in the course of the continuing confrontation with the venerable figure of Parmenides and the challenges posed by his thought. This volume is a collaborative effort by an international array of scholars, reflecting a range of outlooks and approaches, and exploring some of the various forms taken by the reception of Parmenides' ontology. Some of the essays were invited by the editors, others were selected by blind review from submissions made in response to a call for papers.

The arrangement of essays is roughly chronological in order. In chapter 1, "Being at Play: Naming and Non-Naming in the Anonymous *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia*," Christopher Kurfess considers the way that names are handled in a curious document transmitted as part of the Aristotelian cor-

<sup>2</sup> On this tradition, see J.D. Turner & K. Corrigan (eds.), *Plato's Parmenides and Its Heritage*, 2 vols. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> For earlier phases in the reception of Eleatic ontology, see N. Galgano & R. Cherubin (eds.) *Eleatic Ontology: Origin and reception*, in *Anais de Filosofia Clássica* 14, issues 27 and 28 (2020) and D. Bronstein & F. Mié (eds.), *Eleatic Ontology in Aristotle*, in *Peitho: Examina Antiqua* 12, no. 1 (2021).

pus, noting its continuities with earlier instances of the reception of Eleatic thought. In chapter 2, “Healthy, Immutable, and Beautiful: Eleatic Pantheism and Epicurean Theology,” Enrico Piergiacomini reconstructs an Epicurean view of, and response to, a pantheistic Parmenidean theology. In chapter 3, “Dualism and Platonism: Plutarch’s Parmenides,” Carlo Delle Donne introduces us to Plutarch’s Platonism, reading Parmenides as a forerunner of Plato in both ontology and the account of the sensible world. In chapter 4, “Clement of Alexandria and the Eleatization of Xenophanes,” William H.F. Altman focuses on Clement of Alexandria’s role in preserving several key theological fragments of Xenophanes and invites us to reconsider modern scholars’ dismissal of both Xenophanes’ status as an Eleatic and Clement’s claim of Greek philosophy’s debt to Hebrew Scripture. In chapter 5, “Parmenides’ Philosophy through Plato’s *Parmenides* in Origen of Alexandria,” Ilaria L.E. Ramelli explores the reception of Parmenides’ thought in Origen, one of the main exponents of patristic philosophy. In chapter 6, “Platonism and Eleaticism,” Lloyd P. Gerson provides an analysis of the appropriation of Eleatic philosophy by Plato and the Platonists, with a particular focus on Plotinus. In chapter 7, “Augustine and Eleatic Ontology,” Giovanni Catapano illustrates the general aspects and the essential contents of Augustinian ontology as they relate to distinctive theses of the Eleatics. In chapter 8, “Proclus and the Overcoming of Eleaticism without Parricide,” Anna Motta investigates the debt that Plato incurred with the Eleatics according to Proclus. In chapter 9, “Why Rescue Parmenides? On Zeno’s Ontology in Simplicius,” Marc-Antoine Gavray examines the role Simplicius attributes to Zeno in Eleatic ontology and tries to determine his place within the Neoplatonic system.

Ancient texts and authors are cited using the abbreviations in LSJ, rev. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (i.e., H.G. Liddell & R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford, 1940; rev. supplement 1996]) except where otherwise indicated. Journal titles are abbreviated as in *L’Année Philologique*. In citations of fragments of the Presocratics, those cited with “DK” refer to H. Diels & W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951–1952); references with “LM” refer to A. Laks & G.W. Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

No knowledge of Greek is assumed. Apart from the footnotes, all Greek in the essays is accompanied by a translation. Translations are the author’s own, unless otherwise indicated. Scholarly literature is cited with full bibliographical information on its first occurrence; subsequent citations of the same

source within a given chapter use a shortened form. Full information for all references can be found in the detailed list at the end of each chapter.

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*This volume is dedicated to the memory  
of Giovanni Casertano*