

Reviews

Alain Martin and Oliver Primavesi, *L'Empédocle de Strasbourg* (P. Strasb. gr. Inv. 1665–1666). Edited with introduction and commentary, Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire of Strasbourg and Walter de Gruyter, Berlin – New York, 1999.

On 14 April 1994, Alain Martin, professor of classical philology at the Free University of Brussels, announced the identification of new fragments of Empedocles in a papyrus entrusted to him by the Bibliothèque Nationale of Strasbourg three years before. Any discovery of new texts from the past is an event, as was the case with the Copt library of Nag Hammadi or the manuscripts of the Dead Sea. Although the treasure here seems less impressive, the discovery has important features, if only because it concerns philosophical texts belonging to the Presocratic period, in other words, a period from which we possess only a very limited number of fragments. Among the 74 legible lines thus wrested from the silence are 54 previously unknown. Their content does not merely summarize Empedocles, it makes it possible moreover to resolve problems which had remained in abeyance in the exegetical tradition and reveals the place of Presocratic studies in Egypt where the papyrus was discovered. The discovery's location agrees with past findings, according to which the presence of Empedocles' thought in northern Africa was longstanding and perennial, since there is evidence of its appropriation as late as the Arab philosophy of medieval Spain. As for the textual content, Alain Martin's philological work has, firstly, thanks to a stichometrical note in the margin indicating the 300th line, made it possible to specify the place of part of the text in the general arrangement of the poem and then to prove, thanks to daimonology which shapes the fundamental nature of the fragments discovered, that there are not two *Poems* of Empedocles, *On Nature* and *Purifications*, but just one, devoted to 'physics.'

It was in classical Panopolis (present-day Achmîm) that in 1904 the German archaeologist, Otto Rubensohn, purchased a funerary crown with a support made up of a papyrus dating from the first century AD. Unfortunately, important portions had been cut out, probably to make other crowns. It was acquired a year later by the University Library of Strasbourg, fifty-two crumbling scraps of papyrus which discouraged researchers for a long while. Its patient reconstruction by Alain Martin has made it possible to establish that the original manuscript belonged to Books I and II of Empedocles' *Physics*. At the present time, it constitutes the sole direct witness to the poem, since the fragments which we have come from citations taken from Aristotle, Plutarch, Simplicius, and others. Moreover, it reveals the importance of Greek philosophy in Panopolis in the late Empire.

Beyond the detailed description of the papyrus, Alain Martin's philological and papyrological talents give us a reconstruction of the text and an edition (with accompanying translation) but also shed new light on previously known fragments of Empedocles. The commentary in itself constitutes a remarkable philological and historical work, indeed a remarkable feat of conceptual clarification. It is an exemplary book and will enable

specialists to undertake the study of Empedocles with renewed confidence and educated people to take account not only of the importance of Presocratic thought in the formation of European thought but also of classical philology as a scientific discipline at a time when it is being challenged by public authorities. The almost exhaustive bibliography, the index of terms and classical authors, and the correspondences constitute a valuable tool.

The philosophical section of the work as well as questions relating to the doctrine of Empedocles and the indirect sources are the work of Oliver Primavesi, who presented his contribution as a thesis for the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University of Frankfurt am Main. The author begins with a review of interpretations of the fragments. His approach follows a precise itinerary between the presentation of less contested points to those which present difficulties, in order finally to draw out the contribution of the new fragments. Although the terminology employed by the author to denote the four 'roots' (fire, air, water, earth) is anachronistic, that is to say, it comes from an Aristotelian tradition embellished with references to atomist concepts (elements, principles, particles, dust . . .), it nevertheless has the merit of making clearer his interpretation and the debate which his philosophical approach joins. The option chosen by Primavesi tallies well with the English-speaking classical tradition, which hides from sight the poetic character of Empedocles' work and thus the mythic character of the discourse. However, the text is clear on this point, and the four 'roots' are named Zeus, Aidoneus, Nestis, and Hera, and there is no reason why Philotès (Love) and Neikos (Strife) should not themselves be mythic figures. The poetic character of the analysis was recognized in classical times. This is a dimension of the text which I have always emphasized in my publications and which is reinforced by the new fragments concerning daimonology, that is, invisible entities which are not truly accessible in other than mythic fashion. The absence of any reference in Oliver Primavesi's work to a mythic interpretation should stimulate new studies, a rereading of Empedocles illuminated by an analysis of the philosopher's myth and daimonology. However, this reservation in no way lessens the contribution of his work which appreciably advances the present debate.

The studies of F. Panzerbieter and, above all, of Denis O'Brien are confirmed and rehabilitated by Alain Martin's work. In his philosophical analysis, Oliver Primavesi first reviews 'the facts universally admitted,' that is, the four 'elements' (fire, water, earth, air) and the two powers (Love and Strife). He then goes on to the biological perspective, and more especially to the status of the four zoogonic levels, each of which is characterized by a means of production of living beings proper to itself: (a) disjointed limbs condemned to wandering are born; (b) complex beings are formed at random from the isolated limbs; (c) through the agency of fire, rudimentary beings arise from the earth, without limbs or definite sex; (d) beings capable of producing similar progeny, by different means (sexuality, egg, fructification . . .) are engendered.

This so-called 'biological' perspective is in fact integrated in the cosmogonic account analysed by the author in four phases: total unity and rest of the sphere (*sphairos*), under the agency of Love; destruction of the sphere by Strife; arrangement of the elements in large homogeneous masses; appearance of life-forms in the framework of a process of unification ordered by Love who progressively repels Strife towards the circumference. It is in the course of the intermingling of elements of a different nature that living creatures appear. The difficulties start as soon as one seeks to specify the process in question, whether cosmogony or zoogony. The cosmogonic narrative itself has given rise to lengthy

debates, accentuated by the existence of a dual zoogonic process. In the first case, the interpretation adopted is that of Denis O'Brien, who assumed that Love already resided at the centre at the moment when the power of Strife was manifested by the formation of large masses from which other processes emerged. According to this perspective, confirmed henceforth by the new fragments, while Strife has control Love is progressively repelled towards the centre and ultimately confined there, whence he will spring into new life. And, at the moment of Strife's triumph, four concentric masses would occur, composed of the four elements, endowed with life by a rapid movement. The greatest difficulty is to be found in the figure of the sphere, minimized by some expositors (U. Hölscher and N. Van der Ben) or used in a very ambiguous and metaphorical fashion by J. Bollack, who sees in it a dynamic model in a constant process of realization and each time achieved in provisional fashion. Denis O'Brien's position, adopted by Oliver Primavesi, appears to me to agree with the texts of Empedocles. Nevertheless, what still remains ambiguous in this position is to understand how the system is maintained at the moment of Strife's triumph, even given the concentric strata in movement.

In the wake of these difficulties the question of dual zoogony also arises. This adds to the philosophical difficulty the philological problem of the choice of terms which are appropriate in 17, 5. The papyrus bears witness to the existence of two zoogonies. It confirms the concept, preserved by Aristotle, of a creation through the process of Strife, which has misled interpreters. Primavesi is once more in agreement with O'Brien's interpretation, which departs from the usual minimalist reading (which opposes birth and death, life and age, health and illness) and holds that in the world dominated by Love the limbs, apparently isolated at the first zoogonic stage and already combined in a body in the course of the second, pursue their process of gathering together, in order finally to merge in the sphere, while in the world dominated by Strife, the force of separation increases in power at this juncture so that beings in the fourth zoogonic stage do not die normally, but must die savagely torn to pieces, letting their disjointed limbs wander until they are destroyed. According to the papyrus, it is in the framework of the great whirlwind which marks the acme of Strife's power that the violent separation of the limbs composing the living occurs, then the death and decay of the isolated limbs (d 1–10 and pp. 283–4). Here again another question remains, dare I say it, unresolved: the fact that fr. 17 1–12 combines this process of the dual birth of the 'mortals' (the meaning of which remains ambiguous and could equally refer to inanimate things) in a process of dual coming-into-being, in which creation is produced by separation, as Aristotle observed. There is undoubtedly a creation by means of separation and dispersion – neglected by the interpreters – as in the explosion of the stars which produce other stars from one original star, as there is the possibility of producing a multiplicity of things by the division of a single original thing. This type of genesis by dispersion and division (an echo of which is to be found in the Platonic method of division) is also in retreat in current studies of Empedocles as a result of which they fail to take into account the mythic which makes it possible to envisage, in the course of a process of fragmentation which calls for conceptual adjustment, the division of functions and powers in modifying a narrative process which brings successive geneses into play.

Finally, in a fourth heading, O. Primavesi develops the daimonological question (already present in fr. 59 and 115), which the new fragments guarantee a favoured place (d 1–18). The attempts of W. Nestle, F. M. Cornford, and D. O'Brien, who were reluctant to see this

question as independent of 'physics,' are henceforth confirmed. Cornford had already proposed the notion that the daimons would be scattered particles of Love, mixed, in the course of a series of incarnations, with particles of Strife. It now appears, thanks to this papyrus, that this was indeed how they were and that they participate in the two worlds which succeed each other in each revolution of the cycle. The particles of Love called 'daimons' would gradually invest the four elements giving rise to different combinations: at first, isolated limbs; then complex entities, some monstrous and some normal; and finally their integration in the serene harmony of the sphere. The end of this state of tranquillity would result from 'an incident' which would shake this ideal state and which would concern a fault 'the exact nature of which our evidence does not allow us to discern' (p. 96). Thus the chain of life would once more resume its progressive course of differentiation and separation proper to the ascent of Strife. The daimons who find themselves enclosed there would begin their 'sorrowful journey' and, at the time of that process, the global beings ceding place to jointed and sexually differentiated creatures which people the world of which we were to be 'witnesses and actors,' our present world, and who would take their course towards violence, finally leaving the four elements free to group themselves together according to their proper natures, in accordance with the principle that like attracts like. It is this stage which represents the triumph of Strife which would form a whirlwind with a rapid rotary motion (Dinos), where the daimons are delivered 'from their punishment in the form of exile,' before being the motor in the Love of which they are parts of a new destiny in the direction of Unity, inaugurating a new revolution of the cycle. This status of the daimons is not without consequences for the ethics, ritual, or dietics to be adopted by man.

In conclusion, I would say that Empedocles' 'physics,' thus integrating a daimonology, results in a way of life for man in fact founded on a myth of origin. Thus the unresolved problem is to know whether and to what extent a literal reading of the fragments veils this approach current among thinkers who make use of poetic writings and myths. Moreover, this interpretation of the migration of daimons across the living world and throughout the cycles under the sign of Love, like the 'particles' (I would prefer to say like the 'parts' which are proper to them), brings gnostic pneumatology to mind. Was Empedocles one of the sources of this thought which, we should remember, was widespread in Egypt? It is not impossible. But if gnosticism is itself submitted to a mythic interpretation whose threads today's specialists are attempting to disentangle, it must once more be recognized that the question of myth lies at the centre of the interpretation of Empedocles' thought.

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(translated from the French by Juliet Vale)

Parmenides, *On Nature, or On Being*, text, translation, and commentary by Barbara Cassin, 'Points,' Paris, Ed. Seuil, 1998.

The first impression left by this volume is that this is above all, a new type of philosophical thought. Through her presentation of Parmenides' poem, Barbara Cassin in effect gives us an original work at the philosophical level, where an investigation of the origins of Greek thought is developed under the dominant theme of the classical hermeneutic tradition. It should be made clear from the outset that this book is simultaneously *about*