Book Review


The first paper (Th. K. Johansen, Parmenides’ Likely Story, pp. 1–29) adds a fresh chapter to the conspicuous number of attempts contemporary scholars have made to reconcile ἀλήθεια and δόξα in Parmenides. The main point of the paper (which is not completely new, as the author himself admits) consists in showing that the “criteria of the intelligible discourse which are paradigmatically met by being” are partially fulfilled, according to Parmenides, by the cosmos, so that it “comes to resemble being and thereby achieves a degree of intelligibility and reality”. If this is true, Parmenides’ cosmology ends up being a rough precursor of the story told by Plato in the Timaeus. Johansen’s arguments look interesting from many points of view. But unfortunately they hang on an inadequate analysis of the passage, in the poems, that is crucial for the purpose at issue, namely: the last 5 verses of fr. 1, where the goddess explains why an inquiry into the δοκοῦντα is also needed. It is true that “almost everything about these lines is disputed”, so that the author’s warning in this regard (“I shall be brief and dogmatic, referring readers, in lieu of arguments, to already existing scholarship”) does not seem completely unreasonable. But his analysis, though understandably short, should not have been silent on the very crucial problem of the clause of the last verse, which is notoriously disputed between περῶντα and περ ὄντα. Johansen accepts without any comment the first version, which implies in turn that we read δοκίμως as “really, genuine” (Owen, CQ NS 10, 1960). But, pace Owen (and the lexica the editors refers to), the only occurrence of the word significant for Parmenides, namely Aeschylus, Persae 547 (the other recorded occurrence being Xenoph. Cyr., 1, 6. 7), hardly supports the proposed translation. Indeed, it is all but clear why the chorus of the Persae, in adding their own pain to the Queen’s sorrow for the death of her husband, should specify that this pain is “real” or “genuine”. Rather, they should say that they are adding their “public” pain to the private sorrow of the Queen, as in fact
can be easily detected from the context. Moreover, the meaning of δοκίμως, which has the same root, can hardly be considered “counterfactual” in relation to δοξα (as Johansen supposes); rather, it should somehow have the same meaning, i.e. it should suggest something that is real inasmuch as it is accepted or apparent, and so on. If, finally, we combine this interpretation of δοκίμως with the alternative clause περ ὄντα, we are faced with a *iunctura* very common in the epic literature: qualification + περ (with a concessive value) + the participle of the verb εἶναι. Understood in such terms, the meaning of the sentence becomes the following: you should take into consideration also τα δοκοῦντα, inasmuch as, even though they do not meet the “criteria of the intelligible discourse which are paradigmatically met by being”, in some way (περ) they “are” (ὄντα), i.e. exist, namely in the way specified by the adverb δοκίμως. Here I have summarized the conclusions I have reached in a paper published in the journal “Hyperboreus” in 1998 (pp. 5–20). Of course I do not wish to claim that the author agrees with me. Moreover, it is probably too much to assume that he knows an Italian paper published in a Russian journal 20 years ago. But two consideration are in order: 1) from a scholarly point of view it is unacceptable that all the titles listed in the bibliography are in English (this reproach is valid for almost all the papers included in the journal; so I am not going to repeat it further); 2) the alternative περώντα / περ ὄντα should have been taken into consideration anyway.

The second paper (F.V. Trivigno, *The Moral and Literary Character of Hippias in Plato*, pp. 31–65) deals with Plato’s *Hippias Major*. The main thesis of the paper is that the character of Hippias is well-conceived by Plato and modelled after the stock figure of the “impostor” that is very common in Attic comedy (in this sense, the author argues, Hippias should be defined as a “fool” and not as someone “stupid”). As a consequence, the reasons put forward by many scholars against the authenticity of the dialogue no longer apply: in the *Hippias Major*, as well as in other dialogues, Plato pursues the aim of showing the right method of inquiry by the refutation/education of Socrates’ interlocutor. The paper looks a little long-winded to me and not particularly informative. I can hardly understand, first of all, why the author considers it important to clearly establish whether Hippias is a “stupid” person or a “fool”. Since Plato is the absolute master of his characters, and of the purposes for which he shapes them in a certain way, their supposed stupidity or foolishness has nothing to do with the literary reliability of the dialogue or its authenticity. Secondly, it is not so clear to me how important the difference between stupid and foolish really is. Moreover, if “fool” means “impostor”, this is hardly compatible with the educative attitude Trivigno ascribes to Socrates in relation to Hippias: Socrates might want to educate an ignoramus, inasmuch as this ignoramus ignores that