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### Parmenides' Timeless Universe, Again

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renovates a tradition as thoroughly as Gauthier has renovated contractarianism, it is tempting to read the fate of the genus in that of the particular species. If the argument of the preceding sections is correct, then for all his enviable rigour and ingenuity Gauthier has not managed to reconcile the conflicting forces which appear to be inherent in the contractarian programme. Should we then conclude that these forces are irreconcilable and that the programme should therefore be abandoned? Although I can see no way of rehabilitating the contractarian enterprise, at this stage any such conclusion would clearly be premature. The fate of contractarianism as a moral methodology will be decided only after a lengthy philosophical debate, which *Morals by Agreement* will do much to stimulate. My aim here has not been to anticipate the outcome of that debate but merely to propose some items for its agenda.

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### Intervention

## Parmenides' Timeless Universe, Again

LEO GROARKE *Wilfrid Laurier University*

In a recent discussion note,<sup>1</sup> Mohan Matthen criticizes my claim that Parmenides is committed to an atemporal reality. I shall argue that his critique misrepresents by views, misunderstands Parmenides, and is founded on a capricious view of historical interpretation.

The focus of Matthen's critique is his claim that "Groarke attributes to Parmenides the view that truth is a sort of existence, because he thinks that it is attractive to someone of Parmenides' persuasions" (555). This is a peculiar claim given that I never discuss Parmenides' view of truth. Rather, my account is based on the claim that Parmenides argues (1) that past and future do not exist, and (2) that claims about them are, therefore, nonsensical. Parmenides' claim that (1) and (2) are true requires, of course, an implicit account of truth, but it has nothing to do with his reasons for espousing them (and nothing to do with my reasons for espousing this particular interpretation).

The key to my account is the suggestion that Parmenides' rejection of what does not exist entails the rejection of the past and future, for they do not exist (because the past no longer exists and the future does not yet exist). This is, I think, the most plausible interpretation of Parmenides' claim that what is "neither was ... once nor will be, since [it] is now"

<sup>1</sup> Mohan Matthen, "A Note on Parmenides' Denial of Past and Future", *Dialogue* 25/3 (1986), 553-557.

(8.5, cf. my previous discussion of 8.19-20). It follows that sentences cannot meaningfully refer to the past and future, for we cannot refer to what is not (8.8).

In answer to such views, Matthen argues that there is a sense in which past- and future-tense sentences can have a referent (for if John exists, then he is an existing referent for the sentences "John had a tan" and "John will have a tan"), but this is not the sense I had in mind. Thus the ordinary view is that sentences refer to moments or intervals of time. The sentence "John was tanned" refers, for example, to John, but also to moments and intervals of time that existed in the past. Parmenides' problem is that these no longer exist and it is in view of this that he concludes that we cannot refer to them. This apparent lack of reference cannot be resolved as Matthen suggests, by noting that the sentences in question may refer to *other* things (e.g., John) that presently exist. One cannot avoid the problem of reference in the sentence "Leo is riding Pegasus" by noting that Leo exists.

It is in view of this that Matthen need not attempt to salvage my account by supposing that I hold that Parmenides believes that sentences refer as a whole, to whole "facts, events, or situations" (554), and concludes that all false sentences must lack a referent, for the facts that they refer to do not exist. In fact, I do not think that this is an implausible view of Parmenides, but it is neither required nor suggested by my account.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, the proposed account of time allows that the sentence "John is in my office" may be false, though it may still be said that all the things that it refers to (John, the present moment, and my office) still exist. In contrast, the sentence "John was in my office" presents a problem, for the time that it refers to no longer exists.

Yet it is not merely the past and future which are rejected by Parmenides. On the contrary, the elimination of past and future makes an intelligible notion of time (understood as a continuum extending from past to present to future) difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. It is as though one were to eliminate right from the pair left/right and suppose that one still has an intelligible notion of direction (or cause from the pair cause/effect and suppose that one has an intelligible notion of causation). Matthen (like Taran) fails to appreciate this when he suggests that Parmenides would be better off saving time even if he rejected past and future (555). The problem is that time is undermined in the process and reality is not left temporal, at least in any ordinary sense.

One may answer that this rejection of past and future shows, as Matthen suggests, only that claims about them are false, and not that they are meaningless. Yet Parmenides holds (at 8.9) that one cannot refer to the non-existent (a claim which Matthen emphasizes), and this entails

that he must reject the very possibility of referring to them. He is left with a timeless universe in which it is impossible to refer to the past or future.

Matthen's dissatisfaction with such an interpretation, and the whole account that he attributes to me, apparently stem from his claim that it leaves Parmenides with a counter-intuitive view of the world. In rejecting the claim that Parmenides might hold that one cannot think or say anything false (a claim he mistakenly attributes to me), he says only that this "is an extremely implausible thing to maintain" (555). Such criteria would, I think, undermine Matthen's own interpretation of Parmenides (which suggests that he is committed to the present existence of past and future facts), but there is a more fundamental point that needs to be made in this regard. Thus Parmenides, or any other historical figure, must be judged, not by what seems implausible to *us* in the present context, but by what would seem plausible from his own perspective and his own intellectual milieu. Monism and the denial of change are themselves extremely implausible from our perspective, but this obviously cannot be used to discard the suggestion that Parmenides is a monist. Rather, we must judge an interpretation of Parmenides by considering its relationship to the extant fragments, the problems he grapples with, and with the problems of his day.

Using these criteria, the proposed interpretation fares extremely well. The problems with past and future it suggests are a reflection of Parmenidean questions about reference to the non-existent which are an integral part of the Greek intellectual tradition. The latter problems play, for example, a central role in sophism, which is greatly influenced by Parmenidean views, primarily through Zeno (on the problems and Zeno's influence, see Kerferd<sup>3</sup>). The questions such problems raise about the existence of time are explicitly discussed in Sextus Empiricus, who repeatedly argues that "the past and the future are non-existent; for if past and future time exist now, each of them will be present" (PH, 3.144, cf. 106, 142; AM, 9.191f), and who goes on to criticize the very concept of time (see AM, 9.196f, and PH, 3.146).<sup>4</sup> It is, of course, impossible to be certain of the genealogy of this reasoning, but Sextus is the author of little more than a catalogue of traditional Pyrrhonian arguments, and it is quite possible that this specific reasoning is part of the legacy passed from Parmenides to early Pyrrhonism via Megarian philosophy.

It is instructive to compare to this the account that Matthen has proposed. It suggests that Parmenides fails to appreciate the problems we have noted (problems appreciated by other ancients and problems

3 G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, esp. chap. 7 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

4 Sextus Empiricus, vols. 1-4, ed. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933-1949).

2 It is Matthen's account which "demands, and does not just permit, [an ontology of] facts" (557).

which stem from his reasoning), and that he adopts an ontology of facts which Matthen does not establish as a part of Parmenidean philosophy or Greek thought more generally.

The only evidence Matthen does provide is founded on his suggestion that Parmenides' claim that what is "neither was ... once nor will be, since it is now all together" (8.5) might mean "that facts neither perish nor come-to-be in the way that our use of tenses suggests" (556), and that they always exist, though they sometimes do and sometimes do not "obtain". In part because one can ask how things which do not exist could "obtain", it is hard to see how such a view could be a response to Parmenidean reasoning.

Nor is there much support for such a view in the texts. Indeed, Parmenides' claims are an awkward way of putting such a point and if he wished to make it he should deny not that what is was or will be, but that it was *and no longer is* and that it will be *but is not now* (for facts always exist on this account). Such riders are not included in the text and it is *ad hoc* to add them when there is no need to do so. Perhaps there are other passages which can do a better job of backing such an account, but Matthen does not present them. The best he comes up with is a much less significant and, as he puts it, "an equally tendentious" reading of fragment 4.1-2 (556).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Renato Cristi, Chris Tindale and the *Dialogue* referee for comments on a draft of this reply.

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

*Architectonique disjonctive, automates systémiques et idéalité transcendante dans l'oeuvre de G. W. Leibniz*

ANDRÉ ROBINET

Paris: Vrin, 1986. 454 p. 390 FF

L'oeuvre éditée de Leibniz ne constitue encore aujourd'hui qu'un fragment de l'oeuvre complète. Les inédits sont inombrables et se dévoilent avec parcimonie au fur et à mesure que paraissent les volumes de l'Akademie-Ausgabe. Qui plus est, Leibniz tendait à remettre constamment sur le métier les diverses esquisses des éléments de sa philosophie et sa correspondance connaissait des brouillons successifs et des variantes inédites, au travers desquels se révèle la genèse complexe du système. A. Robinet tire parti de sa longue fréquentation des textes leibniziens édités et inédits pour nous décrire ce qu'il considère comme le schéma dynamique d'une philosophie majeure de l'Age classique. Sans doute peut-on récuser la pertinence et la justesse de tel ou tel aspect de la reconstruction proposée, mais à tout le moins le livre d'A. Robinet obligera-t-il les chercheurs de l'avenir à user des méthodes comparatives disponibles pour une étude approfondie des textes du corpus. Alors que l'histoire de la philosophie moderne est trop souvent l'objet d'exégèses « fantaisistes », ce travail nous rappelle à la tâche d'une lecture attentive des textes, d'une masse impressionnante de textes. Une telle lecture est le prélude obligé à des interrogations philosophiques et à des analyses que d'autres pourront sans doute mener très différemment de l'auteur d'*Architectonique disjonctive*...

La démonstration que Robinet nous offre, part du clivage entre deux hypothèses, apparemment antinomiques, sur la nature et la réalité des corps, entre lesquelles la pensée leibnizienne oscillerait à partir du *Discours de métaphysique* (1686) et jusqu'aux tout derniers exposés du système. D'une part, l'hypothèse (D<sub>1</sub>) soutient qu'il n'existe que des substances finies immatérielles et que les corps n'ont que la consistance de phénomènes bien fondés. Il s'agit là d'une doctrine esotérique que Leibniz hésite à communiquer à ses correspondants et au public dans toute sa rigueur. Il envisage donc l'hypothèse (D<sub>2</sub>) selon laquelle il y aurait un sens à reconnaître la substantialité non seulement des esprits finis (substances simples), mais aussi des réalités qu'expriment les corps du monde sensible (substances composées). Il s'agit alors de fonder rationnellement l'ordre des corps en postulant les entités théoriques appropriées. Des notions clés se trouvent successivement proposées qui permettent d'élaborer le système