

**Tomáš Drvota**  
**The cosmology of Parmenides**

The question why the poem of Parmenides includes a detailed account of the origin and the order of the world that according to his ontology is deprived of truth, cannot be answered with certainty. It is only certain that the way described in the prooimion leads beyond this world to salvation through knowledge of the divine principle. We may ask what are the posts of this way and where it is possible to reach unity with the divine principle. There are affinities between the Parmenides' cosmos and his absolute *hen*, and so the ancient idea of the unity of god and the cosmos seems to be at the background of his philosophical system.

The main source of information about the Parmenidean universe is the summary of Aetius, which draws upon Theophrastus, and is preserved to us by Stobaeus (DK 28 A 37).

*Παρμενίδης στεφάνης εἶναι περιπεπλεγμένης ἐπαλλήλους, τὴν μὲν ἐκ τοῦ ἀραιοῦ, τὴν δὲ ἐκ τοῦ πυκνοῦ· μικτὰς δὲ ἄλλας ἐκ φωτὸς καὶ σκότους μεταξὺ τούτων. καὶ τὸ περιέχον δὲ πάσας τείχους δίκην στερεὸν ὑπάρχειν. ὑφ' ᾧ πυρώδης στεφάνη, καὶ τὸ μεσαίτατον πασῶν [στερεόν: Krische], περὶ ὃ πάλιν πυρώδης. τῶν δὲ συμμιγῶν τὴν μεσαιτάτην ἀπάσαις τοκέα πάσης κινήσεως καὶ γενέσεως ὑπάρχειν, ἥντινα καὶ δαίμονα κυβερνήτην καὶ κληροῦχον ἐπονομάζει Δίκην τε καὶ Ἀνάγκην.*

The phrase *μεσαίτατον πασῶν στερεόν*, *περὶ ὃ πάλιν πυρώδης* (*στερεόν* being added by Krisch) has never been convincingly explained. Krisch's emendation presents us with the idea of a solid center being surrounded by a fiery wreath. In order to support this interpretation scholars have developed various theories. Diels rather forcedly emends *περὶ ὃν* to *ὑφ' ᾧ* and argues that what we have here is basically a Pythagorean model of the universe that presupposes a fiery center, Hestia, who is a governing principle, and should be identified with the Parmenidean goddess. Despite its enormous influence (Morrison, Finkelberg), this interpretation (anticipated by Tannery), is untenable. Not only is the Pythagorean model of the universe of a later date, it does not seem to resemble the cosmos of Parmenides, as indicated by the fragments, in the least. The Pythagoreans imagined that the earth, the counter-earth (*antigē*) and seven planets revolve around the fiery center, being surrounded by the firmament of the fixed stars. In Parmenides' model, the earth is in the center, there is no *antigē*, the only planet known is Venus, and the fixed stars are located under the sun. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that the heavenly gate, according to the prooimion the place of the goddess, was located in the fiery center of the universe.

Bollack (following Reinhardt) suggests that the improbable model of the universe indicated by the difficult sentence describes some pre-cosmic or pre-cosmogonic state of the world, meant to be transformed into an actual world by the cosmogonic movement. This interpretation is not supported by any textual evidence, however. According to Fränkel, Theophrastus might have misunderstood the fragment B 12, but this explanation is again hard to prove. It would seem, therefore, that the most satisfactory solution is the one proposed by Döring, viz. to reject the obscure testimony. If we venture to make this radical move, we will gain a comparably clear and coherent model of the world. Between the two cosmic principles, the solid and dark center and the periphery ruled by the pure and unmixed principle, is the center of the cosmos, viz. the place of the goddess who creates the phenomenal world by mixing the two principles together. The cosmos is divided into three spheres: 1/ *τὰ περίγεια*, viz. the earth consisting of the dark and solid principle, whose exhalations make the air, 2/ *οὐρανός*, viz. the mixed fire (the moon, a mixture of earthy and fiery exhalations, the milky way, the essence of the most perfect mixture, from whose center the sun and the moon were separated; the sun from the lighter and warmer mixture, the moon from the denser and cold

one. The milky way is also the seat of the goddess, since it is here that the most perfect opposites are mixed, and here is also the center of the cosmic genesis (B 12). The milky way is also the location of the fixed stars and the zodiac, the highest point is the wreath of the sun). 3/ *αἰθήρ*: the pure, unmixed fire (here Eos and Hesperos, i.e. the planet Venus, is probably located). All these wreaths are surrounded by a hard husk, *τὸ στερεόν*.

On the basis of this reconstruction it is possible to outline the main features of the Parmenidean cosmological system. It is a very archaic conception of the universe divided into three spheres, paralleled in the Babylonian and Indian cosmography. In contrast to the systems recognizing the seven planets, in this case the fixed stars are located under the sun (probably a residue of an old Babylonian idea, according to which the trinity of the sun, the moon and Venus – Shamash, Sin and Ishtar – stands against the sphere of the fixed stars). In Greece, this system is recognizable in the thought of Anaximander, Metrodorus or Leucippus as a parallel to the more developed Pythagorean model.

Another important feature of this system is a contraposition of two balancing cosmic principles, Fire and Earth. A dark and solid principle is represented in the very centre, while the edges are dominated by a principle that is light and thin. Between these extremes, there is a gradual transition from one principle to the other. In the process of creation of a cosmos, these two elementarily pure principles mingle and mix. Yet whenever this process is referred to as 'hateful' or 'abominable' (*stygeros*), we can assume that everything that stems from it has a negative character. In the proem, Parmenides describes a passage leading out of this world and towards knowledge of eternal and immutable truth.