

Peter Kingsley, *Reality*, The Golden Sufi Center, Inverness, 2003
(pp. 591, ISBN 1-890-350-08-7 (hb), ISBN 1-890-350-09-5)

An introduction to, or more precisely, an initiation into the world of *μητις* is the shortest description of this outstanding book – an initiation into the world of Parmenides and Empedocles, into the world of Greeks, into the world in which we, Europeans, actually live. The author's intent is not to give us another piece of scholarly work or to contribute to our knowledge about Greek philosophy, although he does that too. He is going to transform the reader existentially, to turn him to the true reality. This explains the title - *Reality* - the real subject of this unusual discourse. The book is consciously left outside the boundaries of scholarly conventions. Not only that there is no index, no numbering of fragments, no footnotes and the table of contents lists only two parts of a book of about 600 pages. Kingsley is telling a story – the 'strange story of our lives' (15) – and writes it in stone, not in paper, 'and you are the stone' (15). The sceptical academic will be tempted to dismiss this 'story' straight away, but perhaps he or she should overcome his prejudices.

The book is based on high quality research. There are several points of innovation. (1) Kingsley challenges the traditional thesis of Parmenides as the founder of logic and rational discourse. (2) He goes further than anybody else in rejecting the *from mythos to logos* formula introducing the concept of *μητις* as a fundamental characteristic of reality, recognized by Homer and by Greek philosophers. (3) Analyzing the *μητις* vocabulary, he finds new links between Parmenides and Empedocles and explains the positive characteristics of Strife, (4) This sheds light on the irrational (or better the suprarational) aspect of Socratic *ἔλεγχος* and on Platonic mysticism. (5) This contributes to the better understanding of Phoenicians elements in Greek culture. (6) In Parmenidean and Empedoclean texts the reader will find some unexpected links to the sophistic *ἐμβουλία* – the practical wisdom in the world of change. But by introducing *μητις*, Kingsley is not looking for a common ground. He is not looking for logical means of resolving contradictions in philosophical doctrines in favour of the unity of philosophical 'development'. 'In the world of *μητις* there is no neutral ground... The more you let yourself become a part of it the more you begin to discover that absolutely everything, including the fabric of reality itself, is trickery and illusion (91)'. Here we have the grounds of the particular mysticism Kingsley expounds in his book. Every philosophical

teaching is a road to an illusory and not rational reality. It does not contain germs of truth to be collected in a big picture. On the contrary, it conveys the reality by its illusory nature, by its deceitfulness, by its cunning tricks. That is why Kingsley is so sensitive exploring the language of *μητις* in philosophical texts. Kingsley is not a historian of philosophy who wants to accumulate knowledge but he wants to induce understanding, a kind of mystical experience. And this mystic element might seem the most controversial point in his work.

Reality consists of two parts, the first of five and the second of seven chapters. All five chapters of the first part deal with Parmenides and, in this connection, with Zeno and Socrates. Kingsley sums up the essence of the Parmenidean vocabulary in the word *μητις* - in Greek: cunning, skilfulness, practical intelligence, trickery, and, in philosophical prospective, that which can make humans equal to gods, something quite opposite of everything we understand by concepts. The word refers to the particular quality of intense awareness of the evasive and contradictory reality that always manages to stay focused on the whole (90). Parmenides happens to use this language of *μητις*, rather than anything else, to define the human condition (92). According to Parmenides, the entire human condition can be defined as a lack of *μητις*, which makes man vulnerable (385). But *μητις* is more than that: 'We live in a world created by the *μητις*, the supreme cunning, of a great being: a goddess called Aphrodite.' (385) This fact has to be recognized by man. Man has to adapt to this reality. And this is the instruction Parmenides gets from the goddess Dike. He received his wisdom through incubation; through making the journey into another world (92). Kingsley makes an amazing analysis of fr. 8.65 (ὥς οὐ μὴ ποτὲ τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμη παρελάσσει) and connects it with two passages in Homer - *Iliad* XXIII.313 ff. that nobody could ride past a charioteer who is skilled in *μητις*, and with *Odyssey* IX.365 where the skilled in *μητις* Odysseus tells Polyphemus that his name is Οὐδης. Then the words οὐ μὴ ποτὲ τίς actually refer to *μητις* and this is what the goddess is about to bestow on Parmenides. 'When she introduces her hint about nobody being able to outdo Parmenides in *μητις*, the goddess expresses herself with the help of a pointedly emphatic double negative - οὐ μὴ ποτὲ τίς, nobody at all, absolutely nobody' (226). No ordinary human has the capacity to see or know anything. Knowledge is only reachable through the *ἐλεγχος* of the goddess. All the three goddess' paths are a trick, a *μητις*. At this point Kingsley makes an excursus to Socrates' practice of *ἐλεγχος*, and he connects it with *ἐλεγχος* in the poem of Parmenides. He regards both of these *ἐλεγχοι* as techniques of existential transformation induced by a growing consciousness of the inability of reason to grasp the truth. The *ἐλεγχοι* are essentially forms of philosophical

initiation. Hence, Kingsley argues that it is wrong to regard Socratic *ἔλεγχος* as a search for definitions and a conceptual enterprise. Kingsley gives a similar interpretation to the arguments of Zeno. He was not just performing some clever tricks. He was revealing, with his *μῆτις*, the true reality, the fact that this whole world we believe in is an illusion (298).

In the second part of the book the author turns to Empedocles. He is interpreted along the same lines as a continuator of the tradition of *μῆτις*. Kingsley finds an evidence for this in the last sentence of the opening passage of his poem: 'Mortal resourcefulness (*μῆτις*) can manage no more' (fr. 2.17). Human beings have to put their lives in order under the guidance of divinity and reach for *μῆτις* equal to cosmic Love. In Kingsley's story it is not Love, but Strife that is the positive factor. Imposing harmony and measure on the universe, Love creates an illusion about its nature. She introduces us to a world of deception, rational thinking being part of this deception (482). She takes us hostages of her *μῆτις*. To get free we have to acquire *μῆτις* equal to hers. This can only be done by men who know to bound things in the way she does, by men familiar with her trickery - the magicians. Kingsley argues that Empedocles' cosmological texts are inseparable from his magical conceptions. In his reading of Fragment 115, 'This is the way that I too am now going, an exile from the gods and a wanderer, placing my trust in mad Strife', he finds an evidence for the positive role of Strife, which resolves the unitarian deception of Love (431).

This is a great book indeed, rich in scholarly inventions and spiritual insight. Even the toughest of sceptics will find it entertaining, if not stimulating, and it may be of especial interest to East-European readers, because of its sympathy with Eastern cultures. Kingsley's book is, above all, a brilliant pattern of *μῆτις* in the history of ancient philosophy.

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