

REVIEW OF / RESEÑA DE: Saetta Cottone, Rossella, *Soleil et connaissance. Empédocle avant Platon*, Collection «Encre marine», Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2023, XVI + 296 pp.

Rossella Saetta Cottone (=A.), Directeur de recherche at the CNRS – Institut Léon Robin, worked for many years in Paris with J. Bollack, one of the sharpest and most interesting philologists and ancient philosophy historians of the last century. She has concentrated on presocratics, especially on Empedocles and the culture of the fifth century B. C., as is also shown by the interesting seminars through which she has promoted fruitful debate by both French and foreign scholars for many years. This latest contribution of hers mainly includes a partially new interpretation of Empedoclean physics, an inquiry about fr. 134 D.-K. and a plea that it be assigned to the *Physical Poem*, and a survey of echoes of the philosopher in Aristophanes (and Euripides). Starting from the Sixties, discussion has become more and more lively on many features of Empedocles' work, and especially on the number of the cosmogonies and zoogonies (one or two), the number of his poems, and the relationship between physics and daimonology. None of these points has been clarified definitely, not even through the much-celebrated publication of the Strasbourg Papyrus. However, in the last decades the two-cosmogony (and two-zoogony) theory almost seems to have got the better of the one-cosmogony (and one-zoogony) theory. And this —it should be recalled— although no ancient author ever witnessed the two-world pattern nor even any modern scholar ever argued for it before F. Panzerbieter published his conjecture concerning fr. 17.5 (1844). In a rough and necessarily incomplete synthesis, according to the two-cosmogony theory, a first world (and zoogony) is begot by Strife through the gradual disgregation of the *Sphairos*, and a second world (and zoogony) is begot by Love through the gradual re-aggregation of «mortal things». According to the opposite theory, instead, just one world is formed as Strife disgregates the *Sphairos* and cuts the elements into pieces and Love reaggregates them into «mortal things» (see fr. 35 D.-K.). Not even the cycle, whose existence many scholars infer from Aristotle's remarks, is surely attested by Empedocles' fragments, according to the A. —a courageous position, whatever stand one wishes to take, which stimulates everybody to keep an open mind—. The A.'s specific way of supporting the single cosmogony and the single zoogony can be summarized as follows:

1. The chief opposition in Empedoclean physics would lie in the contrast between the *Sphairos* (whom the A. calls «la Sphère») and the Sun; this latter would stand for the whole *kosmos*, because Eudem. fr. 110 Wehrli (= Simplicius, *Phys.* 1183) does not quote the same lines as Plu., *de fac. lun.* 926e (the Sun is not followed by earth and sea in Eudemus, whereas it is in the Chaeronean).

2. That mysterious divinity, the Holy Mind, in fr. 134 D.-K. would be the «Soleil-reflet», the reflection of the «archetype Sun» (cp. A56 D.-K.). The A. (I §6) also takes

into account the witness by Arist., *De anima* B 7, 418 b 13 ff. (= fr. 330 Bollack). She concludes that «le Soleil est un objet sensible et en même temps il ne l'est pas. [...] C'est comme si, par cette construction, Empédocle avait voulu placer, au coeur de son système physique, une représentation divinisée de la connaissance» (p. 60).

This bold concept of the role of knowledge could push Empedocles nearer to Plato and Aristotle (a circumstance which would offer a better understanding of developments between the fifth and the first half of the fourth century B. C.). However, the place of this Holy Mind in the world of «countless perceptible things» (ὄσσα γε δῆλα γεγάκασι ἄσπετα, B23.11), described in the *Physical Poem*, remains not easy to define. On my part, this is certainly not to advocate the collocation of this fragment (and of fr. 133, at least, together with it) in the *Purifications* (as was the choice of H. Diels and J. Bollack): this latter poem offers a new anti-Olympian mythology, but one which leads (like the traditional) to anthropomorphic cults (fr. 128.5-10 D.-K.) –the exact opposite of the austere, intellectualizing anti-anthropomorphism of fr. 133-134. What then? The A., like some other researchers, lends credit to the twelfth-century Byzantine Tzetzes, who assigns fr. 134 to a third book of the *Physical Poem*. However, some scholars on their part (starting from an illuminating 1980 paper of Fr. Solmsen; and an article by R. Laurenti) believe they have recognized parts of the lost *Proem to Apollo* in fr. 131-132-133-134 and 142 in the light of the many differences (both in contents and style) from the *περὶ φύσεως*. So, the place and significance of fr. 134 seem to remain an open question in some measure, at least for the moment.

The second part of the book deals with echoes of Empedocles' thought in the Athenian culture between the fifth and the fourth c. B.C.: Euripides, Agathon, a friend of Euripides' and a disciple of Empedocles' disciple Gorgias, and finally Aristophanes. From the latter's comedies *Νεφέλαι* and *Θεσμοφοριάζουσαι* the A. derives some information, *inter alia*, on the supposed relationship between the structure of the eye and the shape of the Sun, and, more at large, on the connection between the *kosmos* and the human body, in accordance with some archaic features of the presocratic mind. Special attention should be devoted to §11 of the second part, «Aristophane poète empédocléen». The Empedoclean inspiration of the tale about the *androgynoi*, mentioned by J. Bollack and by D. O'Brien to defend the one-zoogony and, respectively, the two-zoogony theory, is confirmed by the A. through a different line of reasoning: she thinks that the originary circular shape of the *androgynoi*, reminiscent of the *Sphairos*, and the effort to regain it express the fundamental unity of man and world. A useful bibliography is added at the end of the book, which shows the A.'s attention not only to recent research but also to classic contributions even by some great scholars of the nineteenth century, such as S. Karsten and P. Tannery. Several sketches on pp. 279-287 clarify several aspects of Empedocles' physics.

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