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Establishing the Logos of Melissus: A Note on Chapter 1, Hippocrates' *De natura hominis*

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Abstract: The earliest mention of Melissus of Samos by name is found in the first chapter of the Hippocratic *De natura hominis*. In the following note, I attempt to examine what is meant by the reference Melissus' '*logos*' in this work and suggest, against previous accounts, including Galen's, that it has little to do with his commitment to monism. Rather Melissus' *logos* is better understood as his referring to his strategy for demonstrating such a conclusion,

especially his use of a supplemental argument in his fragment B8. Polybus' concern in this first chapter is not monism as such but the claims to knowledge monists make. Melissus is a prime example of a monist who fails to grasp what he claims to know.

Keywords: Melissus, Hippocrates, Monism, Eleatics.

What is the *logos* of Melissus? In one respect, at least, this is a relatively straightforward question to answer. The verbatim fragments of this early Greek philosopher preserved by Simplicius and the *testimonia* that survive indicate that Melissus was an advocate of the Eleatic 'One', a form of ontological monism that rejects change, including alteration, rearrangement and locomotion, historically associated with Parmenides and Zeno of Elea. Certainly, the accounts of Plato in the *Theaetetus* (183e-184a) and Aristotle in the *Physics* (1.2-3) strongly connect Melissus with Parmenides, with the latter emphasising their shared commitment to the 'one' as well as their unsound reasoning.¹ Melissus' *logos* might then simply be understood as the book in which he advanced his position or, more simply, his commitment to monism, however we are to understand this.

However, it is a more difficult task to isolate how Melissus' *logos* was understood prior to its fourth-century reception in Plato and Aristotle. It *has* been reasonably, if not definitively, claimed that the concept of void, understood as a precondition for motion, in his B7 was original to Melissus and a significant influence on the atomists.² It is also likely that Gorgias' *On What-Is-Not, or On Nature* directly targeted, perhaps parodically, Melissus' book, which was entitled *On*

¹ For the relationship between Melissus and Parmenides, see Harriman (2018, p. 1-23) for some preliminary thoughts. See also Palmer (2004) and Makin (2014).

² For discussion of this point, see Harriman (2018, p. 181-193). See also Guthrie (1965, p.117-18), Furley (1967, p. 79-103), and Graham (2010, p. 462). I keep to the Diels standard of 'B' numbers for verbatim fragments for convenience.

*Nature, or On What-is.*³ Yet our evidence permits us merely to note these connections as probable.

However, there is some hope for determining the early impact of Melissus. In the following, I set out to examine the earliest unambiguous reference to Melissus and his *logos*, found in the Hippocratic treatise *De natura hominis*.⁴ This fifth-century work, attributed to Hippocrates' student and son-in-law, Polybus, articulates clearly for the first time the theory of the four humours of the human being and their relation to the seasons and to health and disease.⁵ Tantalisingly, Melissus' name and a reference to his *logos* appear in the first chapter of this work in a series of critical remarks that are largely methodological in nature and serve to counter what Polybus understands as the illicit intrusion of philosophy into medicine. How we are to understand the reference is perhaps not immediately obvious, but if we could reconstruct how Polybus appropriated Melissus and his *logos* in this work, we might find a crucial piece of early evidence for the reception of Melissus and his *logos* prior to Plato.

The text of first chapter of *De natura hominis* is worth quoting in full:

Ὅστις μὲν οὖν εἴωθεν ἀκούειν λεγόντων ἀμφὶ τῆς φύσιος τῆς ἀνθρωπείης προσωτέρω ἢ ὅσον αὐτῆς ἐς ἱητρικὴν ἀφήκει, τούτῳ μὲν οὐκ ἐπιτήδειος ὁδε ὁ λόγος ἀκούειν· οὔτε γὰρ τὸ πάμπαν ἡέρα λέγω τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, οὔτε πῦρ, οὔτε ὕδωρ, οὔτε γῆν, οὔτ' ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὃ τι μὴ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐνεὸν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ· ἀλλὰ τοῖσι βουλομένοισι ταῦτα λέγειν παρήμι. δοκέουσι μέντοι μοι οὐκ ὀρθῶς γινώσκειν οἱ ταῦτα λέγοντες· γνώμη μὲν γὰρ τῇ αὐτῇ πάντες χρέονται, λέγουσι δὲ οὐ ταῦτά· ἀλλὰ τῆς μὲν γνώμης τὸν ἐπίλογον τὸν αὐτὸν ποιέονται (φασὶ τε γὰρ ἐν τι εἶναι, ὃ τι ἔστι, καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ ἐν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν) κατὰ δὲ τὰ ὀνόματα οὐχ ὁμολογεῖουσιν· λέγει δ' αὐτῶν ὁ μὲν τις φάσκων ἡέρα τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ ἐν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν,

³ For this point, see Reale (1970, p. 24, n. 97) and Palmer (2009, p. 218–21).

⁴ I hope, then, to supplement here some of the tentative remarks on this passage I made in Harriman (2018, p. 19–22).

⁵ See Jouanna (2012) for a helpful account and overview.

ὁ δὲ πῦρ, ὁ δὲ ὕδωρ, ὁ δὲ γῆν, καὶ ἐπιλέγει ἕκαστος τῷ ἑωυτοῦ λόγῳ μαρτύριά τε καὶ τεκμήρια, ἃ ἔστιν οὐδέν. ὁπότε δὲ γνώμη τῇ αὐτῇ προσχρέονται, λέγουσι δ' οὐ τὰ αὐτά, δηλὸν ὅτι οὐδὲ γινώσκουσιν αὐτά. γνοίη δ' ἂν τόδε τις μάλιστα παραγενόμενος αὐτοῖσιν ἀντιλέγουσιν· πρὸς γὰρ ἀλλήλους ἀντιλέγοντες οἱ αὐτοὶ ἄνδρες τῶν αὐτῶν ἐναντίον ἀκροατέων οὐδέποτε τρίς ἐφεξῆς ὁ αὐτὸς περιγίνεται ἐν τῷ λόγῳ, ἀλλὰ ποτὲ μὲν οὗτος ἐπικρατεῖ, ποτὲ δὲ οὗτος, ποτὲ δὲ ᾧ ἂν τύχη μάλιστα ἢ γλῶσσα ἐπιρρυεῖσα πρὸς τὸν ὄχλον. καίτοι δίκαιόν ἐστι τὸν φάντα ὀρθῶς γινώσκειν ἀμφὶ τῶν πρηγμάτων παρέχειν αἰεὶ ἐπικρατέοντα τὸν λόγον τὸν ἑωυτοῦ, εἴπερ ἑόντα γινώσκει καὶ ὀρθῶς ἀποφαίνεται. ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ γε δοκέουσιν οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ ἑωυτοὺς καταβάλλειν ἐν τοῖσιν ὀνόμασι τῶν λόγων αὐτῶν ὑπὸ ἀσυνεσίας, τὸν δὲ Μελίσσου λόγον ὀρθοῦν.

He who is accustomed to hear speakers discuss the nature of man beyond its relations to medicine will not find the present account of any interest. For I do not say at all that a man is air, or fire, or water, or earth, or anything else that is not an obvious constituent of a man; such accounts I leave to those that care to give them. *Those, however, who give them have not in my opinion correct knowledge* (δοκέουσι μέντοι μοι οὐκ ὀρθῶς γινώσκειν οἱ ταῦτα λέγοντες). For while adopting the same idea they do not give the same account. Though they add the same appendix to their idea – saying that ‘what is’ is a unity, and that this is both unity and the all – yet they are not agreed as to its name. One of them asserts that this one and the all is air, another calls it fire, another, water, and another, earth; while each appends to his own account evidence and proofs that amount to nothing. The fact that, while adopting the same idea, they do not give the same account, shows that their knowledge too is at fault. The best way to realise this is to be present at their debates. Given the same debaters and the same audience, the same man never wins in the discussion three times in succession, but now one is victor, now another, now he who happens to have the most glib tongue in the face of the crowd. *Yet it is right that a man who claims correct knowledge about the facts should maintain his own argument victorious always, if his knowledge be knowledge of reality and if he set it forth correctly. But in my opinion such men by their lack of understanding overthrow themselves in the*

words of their very discussions, and establish the theory of Melissus.

(*De natura hominis* chapter 1. Text and trans. Jones (1923))

Can we determine how the *logos* of Melissus is to be understood here and how the disputants depicted establish it, or set it right (ὀρθοῦν)?⁶ Is it, for example, along the same monistic lines as Plato and Aristotle would lead us to expect? What one can say at the outset is that Polybus is attempting at the start of this work to overthrow those who adopt a view of the world which identifies a single element (e.g. air, fire, water, or earth) as the sole constituent substance of the human and thus those who suggest implicitly or explicitly that a single cure might be discovered for disease.

First let us turn to the ancient reception of Polybus' strategy in Galen's commentary on *De natura hominis*. He takes the error Polybus diagnoses in his targets' accounts to be one centred on identification.⁷ Those who name one specific element of the canonical four fail to support their argument; indirectly, then, they support Melissus. How so? This is because Galen takes Melissus to be a proto-matter theorist who argues for a common (οὐσίαν κοινήν), ungenerated (ἀγέννητον), and imperishable (ἄφθαρτον) substance, equating roughly to 'matter', which underlies the four elements as a substrate.⁸ The back and forth of the debates Polybus describes allegedly indicate that identifying the human person with any one element is flawed because the monists are themselves at odds in their discussions. The idea, then, is that a more basic commitment to something underlying *all the elements* through change would be more plausible and thus support Melissus' position.

⁶ For ὀρθοῦν, cf. Iliad XXIII.695, as noted by Jouanna (1965), with Longrigg (1993, p.89).

⁷ Galen, *In Hippocratis de Natura hominis* 29-31= Mewaldt-Helmreich-Westenberger, 1914, p. 17-18.

⁸ Jones (1923, p. 4, n.1) seems to follow Galen's explanation.

We might object that this Galenic reading of Melissus misunderstands his view of the subject of his treatise—‘what-is’ or being—and his elimination of *all* change and alteration, not just that of some foundational, or primary, substance (see his B8). However, putting that worry to one side, what we might take away is that Galen understands the *logos* of Melissus to be the core, substantive commitment of the philosopher as expounded in his book. It is Melissus’ monistic ontology (i.e. his advocacy of invariant being) that is purportedly established by Polybus’ disputants in spite of their best intentions. If this is right, what we might understand as the core commitment of Melissus’ work (i.e. his *logos*) as portrayed by Plato and Aristotle is, in fact, held in common with Polybus.

That it is Melissus’ monism that Polybus has in mind by his *logos* is similarly assumed by a suggestive account originated by Jouanna, and expanded by Longrigg.⁹ This reading finds a great deal of dialectical subtlety in Polybus’ approach to his targets and an especial place for Diogenes of Apollonia as a target. Longrigg’s reconstruction of the intellectual context and of the substance of the polemic is complex and merits close scrutiny.¹⁰

This approach begins from the striking connection between the words that immediately follow Polybus’ mention of Melissus in the first chapter of *De natura hominis* and Diogenes’ B2.

My view, in general, is that all existing things are altered from the same thing and are the same thing. And this is manifest: for if the things presently existing in this world order: earth, air, fire, and the rest, which plainly exist in this world order, if any of these was different the one from the other, being other in its own nature and not the same as it changed often and altered, in no way would it have been able to mix with another, neither would benefit nor harm <come to one

⁹ Jouanna (1965), Longrigg (1993, p. 85-90).

¹⁰ Longrigg casts his account as largely in keeping with Jouanna’s and makes little claim to originality. I follow the exposition of the former here, who makes the position pellucid.

from the other>.Diogenes of Apollonia DK64B2 (Trans. Graham (2010)).

But I hold that if man were a unity he would never feel pain, as there would be nothing from which a unity could suffer pain. And even if he were to suffer, the cure too would have to be one. But as a matter of fact cures are many. For in the body are many constituents, which, by heating, by cooling, by drying or by wetting one another contrary to nature, engender diseases. (*De natura hominis* chapter 2, trans. Jones (1923)).

We find here two arguments, overlapping in form, which make diametrically opposed points on the affective quality of any substance from the point of view of the monist. Diogenes understands change (importantly, including harm (*blabe*)) as possible only if its constituents share a fundamental nature; this is required to allow for interaction, understood as mixture. Monism, perhaps counter-intuitively, is what *allows* for change. Polybus insists in response that such change, exemplified here by pain, could only be possible if there were a plurality. Change, on his model, requires plurality. Alteration, it is agreed on both sides, entails an interaction between two substances. It is the nature of these two (same or different) that is at issue.

How does such a connection with Diogenes establish the *logos* of Melissus? The thought on this interpretation seems to be that Melissus' rejection of pain and anguish in his account of what-is in B7 works to confirm Polybus' criticism of the monists.¹¹ Diogenes has maintained that harm could only come about as the product of unity. Melissus argued that pain and anguish are incompatible with the completeness of what-is understood as a unity. Polybus' strategy then is firmly dialectical: Diogenes' monistic understanding of the mechanism of harm is targeted not using the assumptions of the

¹¹ οὐδὲ ἀλγεῖ· οὐ γὰρ ἂν πᾶν εἶη ἀλγέον· οὐ γὰρ ἂν δύναιτο αἰε εἶναι χρῆμα ἀλγέον οὐδὲ ἔχει ἴσην δύναμιν τῷ ὑγιεῖ· οὐτ' ἂν ὅμοιον εἶη, εἰ ἀλγέοι· ἀπογινομένου γάρ τευ ἂν ἀλγέοι ἢ προσγινομένου, κούκ ἂν ἔτι ὅμοιον εἶη. οὐδ' ἂν τὸ ὑγιές ἀλγῆσαι δύναιτο· ἀπὸ γὰρ ἂν ὄλοιτο τὸ ὑγιές καὶ τὸ ἐόν, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἐὸν γένοιτο. καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἀνιάσθαι ωὗτὸς λόγος τῷ ἀλγέοντι.

pluralist (which might be thought question-begging) but the terms of monism itself in the form of Melissus. The sting in the tail, Longrigg and Jouanna note, is that Diogenes likely post-dated Melissus and presumably thought he had successfully countered the latter's B7.¹²

If this is right, the instability of the monists in their debates, the supposed advocates of stability and unity, is to be interpreted in the context of Diogenes' revival of monistic physics in the wake of the post-Parmenidean pluralist projects of Empedocles and Anaxagoras. Undoubtedly, such an approach to Polybus' text is dialectically sophisticated and sensitive to his intellectual milieu. However, there are reasons for scepticism.

It is plausible, as Jouanna and Longrigg note,¹³ that Diogenes of Apollonia is relevant to Polybus' strategy in chapter 2, but it is unclear that this is also true of the first chapter or of the mention of Melissus. It is notable that the beginning of the chapter 2 marks a clean break (περὶ μὲν οὖν τούτων ἀρκεῖ μοι τὰ εἰρημένα) from what has come before. The polemic at the start of the work targets *all* monistic accounts of the constituents of the human being in a generalising fashion (οὔτε γὰρ τὸ πάμπαν ἡέρα λέγω τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, οὔτε πῦρ, οὔτε ὕδωρ, οὔτε γῆν, οὔτ' ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὃ τι μὴ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐνεὸν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ). If Diogenes was primarily at issue, it is very surprising that air as a unifying substance is nowhere emphasised over the other three. Indeed any attempt to identify the specific examples Polybus might have had in mind seems to weaken the thoroughgoingness of his approach to the failure of monistic accounts. Crucially, the aim of the first chapter is explicitly general. It is not countering a monistic theory of monism that is attempted, but *all* monistic theories as representative of the failure of the type of

¹² Jouanna (1965, p. 321-2); Longrigg (1993, p. 88-9).

¹³ Although the comparison between Diogenes' B2 and the second chapter is striking, I am not fully convinced that Diogenes is as central as the Jouanna/Longrigg account has it. Polybus takes up different versions of monism in *De natura hominis* (see chapter 6 on 'blood') and any specific reference to Diogenes would most plausibly seem to be on the basis that he was representative of monism generally.

philosophical approach to medicine that Polybus regards as wrong-headed. As such, assuming a central place for Diogenes seems *prima facie* unlikely and perhaps uncharitable to the argument we encounter.

There is no also reason in this first chapter to suggest that the flaw identified needs to have its origin in the any specific commitment to monism as a thesis, as such. The monists overthrow themselves (έωυτούς καταβάλλειν) not because they are monists but because their arguments are insufficient, unstable, and improperly divorced from what it is that they advocating. It is true that *De natura hominis* will attempt to counter any monistic approach to the human person by arguing for a plurality of humours and cures to disease. However, there is good reason to restrict the substance of the dialectic at this work's start, including the reference to Melissus' *logos*, to a methodological worry about how the monists' arguments fail. On such an account, it the nature of arguments themselves that the monists are said to take up, and not the conclusion of such arguments, that is most crucially relevant. This has the virtue of attributing to Polybus an approach that attacks the very core of the philosophical perspective on medical matters. Let us see how this works.

Polybus' criticism may be roughly divided into two related strands, with the first more central to its structure than the second. (1) The monists argue for a single claim but give different arguments for the same conclusion (γνώμη μὲν γὰρ τῇ αὐτῇ πάντες χρέονται, λέγουσι δὲ οὐ ταύτά). (2) They seek to bolster their account with appendices (ἀλλὰ τῆς μὲν γνώμης τὸν ἐπίλογον τὸν αὐτὸν ποιέονται). Both points are repeated twice in the chapter and the empirical appeal to the monists' debates is clearly intended to demonstrate the instability of monism and the weakness of their method. Yet it is striking that Polybus' approach does not turn significantly on the falsehood of monism itself but indirectly makes this point by attacking the means of arriving at such a conclusion.

The concern is to be found prior to any claim about monism in Polybus' understanding of the relation between an argument for a claim and the understanding of that claim. A single thesis, or claim,

is to have a single account given on its behalf (γνώμη μὲν γὰρ τῆ αὐτῆ πάντες χρέονται, λέγουσι δὲ οὐ ταῦτά). Importantly, this account is itself sufficient to demonstrate that those that adopt it have knowledge of the relevant matter. It is also explicitly stated that the understanding of a particular idea can only be indicated by giving a single, correct account of that idea (ὅποτε δὲ γνώμη τῆ αὐτῆ προσχρέονται, λέγουσι δ' οὐ τὰ αὐτά, δῆλον ὅτι οὐδὲ γινώσκουσιν αὐτά). However, the criteria that characterise the knower and their use of arguments go further. A consistent, correct account is not just a necessary and sufficient mark of knowledge; it is also to be understood as the exclusive *correct* account of that piece of knowledge. No alternative means of demonstrating some claim's truth (i.e. its correctness) is possible, and no more comprehensive account desirable. On this line, attempts to buttress arguments with secondary evidence and proofs are indications of the failure of the primary demonstration (καὶ ἐπιλέγει ἕκαστος τῷ ἑωυτοῦ λόγῳ μαρτύριά τε καὶ τεκμήρια, ἃ ἔστιν οὐδέν).

What we should take away from this is that successful demonstration relies on adhering to the above understanding of how a λόγος adequately captures a γνώμη, understood as something like a claim or opinion.¹⁴ So then we need to make a distinction between the γνώμη itself as an opinion or judgement capable of demonstration, which may or may not rise to the level of knowledge or understanding,¹⁵ and the demonstration of that opinion (λόγος). This distinction is emphasised by the heavily verbal, oral depiction of λόγοι in this chapter. We begin with hearing and speaking (ἀκούειν λεγόντων) and conclude with an appeal to live debates as τεκμήρια

¹⁴ Cf. *De natura hominis*, chapter 6 for further examples of this use γνώμη as claim, opinion, or judgement.

¹⁵ Polybus uses various forms of γινώσκειν for 'understanding' in this passage. How might 'knowledge' or 'understanding' be understood by Polybus? At the very least, it is something that can be consistently translated into successful arguments (αἰεὶ ἐπικρατέοντα) without the help of superficial blandishments (γλῶσσα ἐπιρρυεῖσα).

of monistic ignorance; in between, the vocabulary of speaking is predominant (e.g. λέγειν, φάσκων, ἐπιλέγει).

It seems probable that Polybus has an anti-rhetorical and, perhaps, anti-sophistical point in mind in criticising live debates as volatile and emblematic of a poor means at arriving at useful knowledge.¹⁶ For our purposes, two distinctions we have identified in this passage are useful for identifying the value of Melissus' mention within Polybus' strategy, and how we might determine what is meant by his 'logos'. First, we have seen that he distinguishes between an argument sufficient to indicate the status of its adopter as a knower and further appendices (μαρτύριά τε καὶ τεκμήρια) added on to that argument which merely suggest the weakness of the primary demonstration. Second, Polybus is careful to keep a claim (γνώμη), i.e. a conclusion an argument purports to establish, separate from the argument or demonstration (λόγος) used in this effort.

One might think that Polybus has a stringent and quite narrow understanding of what constitutes a sound argument which makes little allowance for the diversity of contexts in which a claim might be raised. We might be sceptical, for example, of the idea that any one conclusion has only a single, correlated argument that may be spoken on its behalf. The criticism of supplemental material is also suspect. Demonstrating that different premises result in the same conclusion is rhetorically powerful, but this need not suggest that such arguments themselves are unsound.

Yet it is unclear that Polybus is generally committed to the implications of these criticisms beyond their value as indicators of the epistemic states of his targets. What I mean is that Polybus need not be understood as concerned to insist directly here that the thesis of monism is false or that a correct argument needs in every situation to conform to the considerations above. Rather Polybus is concerned with whether the monists' arguments do, in fact, suggest that they

¹⁶ Here we might compare the Hippocratic *De arte*; see Mann (2012) for discussion of the sophistical context of this work.

know what they claim to know. It is with this in mind that the status of the appeal to the live debates of the monists becomes clearer.

It seems we are meant to believe that a correctly made argument on behalf of a genuine piece of knowledge should always prove victorious in debate (καίτοι δίκαιόν ἐστι τὸν φάντα ὀρθῶς γινώσκειν ἀμφὶ τῶν πρηγμάτων παρέχειν αἰεὶ ἐπικρατέοντα τὸν λόγον τὸν ἑωυτοῦ, εἴπερ ἐόντα γινώσκει καὶ ὀρθῶς ἀποφαίνεται). One might read this as suggesting that a correct account given of something true *always* proves victorious in debate, and this is difficult to countenance. Polybus' account is normative (δίκαιόν) but only within the restrictive context of the monists' debates, when the same debaters with the same audience (οἱ αὐτοὶ ἄνδρες τῶν αὐτῶν ἐναντίον ἀκροατέων) are advocating for the same idea. In such circumstances, there should be consistent agreement about the argument because the same conclusion is sought within a group of self-proclaimed knowers of that conclusion. The diversity of approaches, as with the use of appendices or additional arguments, is suggestive, in such circumstances, of ignorance.

What these debates prove then is not that a monistic view of the human being is incorrect but that its advocates do not understand what it is they are claiming. It is their status as self-proclaimed knowers that is targeted. This is suggested by Polybus' framing of his empirical evidence.

ὅποτε δὲ γνώμη τῇ αὐτῇ προσχρέονται, λέγουσι δ' οὐ τὰ αὐτά, δηλον ὅτι οὐδὲ γινώσκουσιν αὐτά. γνοίη δ' ἂν τόδε τις μάλιστα παραγενόμενος αὐτοῖσιν ἀντιλέγουσιν

The fact that, while adopting the same idea, they do not give the same account, shows that their knowledge too is at fault. The best way to realise this is to be present at their debates.

(*De natura hominis*, chapter 1. text and trans. Jones (1923))

Jones's 'their knowledge too is at fault' for οὐδὲ γινώσκουσιν αὐτά leaves open the implication that it is *what* the monists know (or claim to know) that is at fault. But this is not Polybus' contention. It is that the monists *do not know* which he undertakes to demonstrate, and the verb γινώσκουσιν makes this beyond doubt. On this reading, the appeal to the debate is simply the best means (μάλιστα) of determining how ignorant the advocates of monism really are. As such, there is something unmistakably *ad hominem* about Polybus' strategy insofar as it is the epistemic states of his targets and not their thesis that is attacked. Yet there is notable persuasive power in suggesting that your opponent is not actually committed to the claim they make. It also worth emphasising that the strategy of this first chapter of *De natura hominis* is preparing the ground for Polybus' extensive investigation into the plural humours of the person. A suggestive rather than determinative polemic might be all that was desired.

How does this help us understand the value of the appeal to Melissus? At the very least, we should be very surprised if λόγος shifted its meaning in the chapter to refer to his monism specifically and not his argument(s) for such a position. Rather Polybus' monist disputants are said to set up Melissus' λόγος, understood as his means of establishing monism. They do so by overthrowing themselves in their discussion (καταβάλλειν ἐν τοῖσιν ὀνόμασι τῶν λόγων αὐτῶν). What does this mean? As we have seen, Polybus has established above the criteria for judging the arguments of those who make a claim to knowledge of the constitution of the person. These focused on the use of different, multiple arguments for the same conclusion, both interpersonally in debate, and intrapersonally in the use of appendices (ἐπίλογοι). If this right, the best place to look I suggest is Melissus' B8.

Initial support for the relevance of this fragment to Polybus' argument is suggested by their shared interest in correct understanding (ὀρθῶς γινώσκειν) and how this is achieved. As we have seen, for Polybus this is signalled by the use of complete, demonstrative, stable arguments without the need for additional

support. A focus on correct understanding and correct demonstration (ὀρθῶς ἀποφαίνεται) is a hallmark of Polybus' polemic. For Melissus, a similar focus on correctness is concerned with the results of sense perception (ὀρθῶς ὀρώμεν καὶ ἀκούομεν; ὀρθῶς ὀρᾶν καὶ ἀκούειν καὶ συνιέναι; ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἐωρῶμεν οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνα πολλὰ ὀρθῶς δοκεῖ εἶναι) and their failure to conform with what each thing must be.¹⁷ This interest is confined to B8 in our collection of fragments.

Crucially, this fragment is explicitly supplemental to Melissus' main demonstration of what-is, as he makes clear in the first line of the text: μέγιστον μὲν οὖν σημειῖον οὗτος ὁ λόγος ὅτι ἐν μόνον ἔστιν· ἀτὰρ καὶ τάδε σημειῖα.¹⁸ What B8 adds is an additional argument or indication that tackles plurality negatively in an attempt to eliminate it as a truly applied predicate of what-is; his other demonstrations have attempted to argue for its substantive, positive description (as sempiternal, unique, exhaustive of what there is, motionless etc.). This is achieved by taking up for consideration, hypothetically and *per impossibile*, the thought that there is a plurality and then attempting to show that each item in this plurality must conform with

¹⁷ For a Hippocratic approach opposed to Melissus on the relationship between understanding and sense perception, see *De arte*, chap 2: δοκέει δὴ μοι τὸ μὲν σύμπαν τέχνη εἶναι οὐδεμία οὐκ ἐοῦσα· καὶ γὰρ ἄλογον τῶν ἐόντων τι ἡγεῖσθαι μὴ ἐόν· ἐπεὶ τῶν γε μὴ ἐόντων τίνα ἂν τίς οὐσίην θεησάμενος ἀπαγγεῖλειεν ὡς ἔστιν; εἰ γὰρ δὴ ἔστι γ' ἰδεῖν τὰ μὴ ἐόντα, ὡσπερ τὰ ἐόντα, οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἂν τις αὐτὰ νομίσειε μὴ ἐόντα, ἃ γε εἶη καὶ ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδεῖν καὶ γνῶμη νοῆσαι ὡς ἔστιν· ἀλλ' ὅπως μὴ οὐκ ἦ τοῦτο τοιοῦτον· ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἐόντα αἰεὶ ὀρᾶται τε καὶ γινώσκεται, τὰ δὲ μὴ ἐόντα οὔτε ὀρᾶται οὔτε γινώσκεται. (Mann). The overlap in language here with B8 suggests a direct response. Finding the relevance of Eleaticism in this chapter is a common theme in the literature; see Mann (2012, p. 25), Taylor (1911, p. 225) and Hankinson (1998, p. 77).

¹⁸ I discuss some of the interpretative approaches to this fragment in Harriman (2018, p. 194-215). One might, with Reinhardt (1916, p. 71-4), wish to compare this fragment with the second half of Parmenides' poem. Perhaps both work to establish further their respective presentations of what-is. Yet Melissus' argument is presented in very different terms as supplemental but still useful, and in no way as deceptive, as on Parmenides' line. It also been debated whether Melissus had a cosmology (now lost) that compared with Parmenides'. See Bicknell (1982) and Palmer (2001) for discussion.

his previous description of what-is: εἰ γὰρ ἦν πολλά, τοιαῦτα χρὴ αὐτὰ εἶναι οἷόν περ ἐγὼ φημι τὸ ἓν εἶναι.

The strategy here is partly concessive. Melissus must put off to one side some features he has attributed to what-is (uniqueness and exhaustiveness) to even entertain the possibility of a plurality. Yet it is clear that this is hypothetically done to reinforce other predicates (sempiternity and the absence of change) he has earlier applied. It is on this basis that entities such as ‘earth, water, air, fire, iron and gold, and one thing living and another dead, and black and white, and all the things people say are real’ can be considered and Melissus can make the argument that each must be as they first appeared if they are truly real. Then the results of sense perception may be exploited to show that there is a contradiction inherent to the pluralist position.

However we make sense of this contradiction,¹⁹ Melissus’ approach is partial and dialectical in its attempt to support a conclusion at the very least adjacent, if not at odds with, the main argument of his book. The fragment concludes as follows:

ἦν δὲ μεταπέση, τὸ μὲν ἐὸν ἀπόλετο, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἐὸν γέγονεν. οὕτως οὖν, εἰ πολλά εἶη, τοιαῦτα χρὴ εἶναι οἷόν περ τὸ ἓν.

But being changed, what-is is destroyed, and what-is-not has come to be. Therefore, if there were many, they ought to be of just the same sort as the One is.

Melissus does not explicitly extend the scope of this argument to support his monism. Rather B8 establishes what a plurality would minimally entail and leaves the reader to work out whether accepting a plurality on such terms is consistent with their motivation (i.e. the results of sense perception) for raising the possibility in the first place. Jonathan Barnes has put this point well: ‘The man who pretends to place some trust in his senses and yet believes that the

¹⁹ Some have located the contradiction at the level of change, e.g. Barnes (1982, p. 299-301). I have argued in Harriman (2018, p. 202-211) that it is through sense perception itself that the pluralists commit to plural entities, but in doing so rely on illicitly on the changeable, unstable senses, which do not reveal what is real.

world is an unchanging place can hardly be taken seriously. Partisans of the senses must not believe everything their favourites tell them.²⁰

This leaves, as Barnes notes, Melissus with the following sort of argument against the pluralists: (a) they believe that many things exist; (b) there is no reason to believe that many things exist. Such an argument is indirect. Monism is not firmly established, but Melissus has managed to argue for the superiority of his rational method of deducing the predicates of what-is independent of the unreliable and contradictory results of sense perception.

If this interpretation is along the right lines, B8 is an excellent example of the supplemental arguments Polybus attacks in *De natura hominis*. The fragment is explicitly an additional proof provided to shore up support for the main series of deductions found in the remainder of Melissus' fragments. The argument in B8 is ingenious, but it is also partial, indirect, and dialectically constructed. In short, it is exactly the sort of argument that indicates for Polybus, fairly or unfairly, an uncertain grasp of the truth and the correct means of demonstrating this. Its existence overthrows Melissus' claim to knowledge.

Finally, we can begin to see how Polybus' disputants establish Melissus' *logos*. ὀρθοῦν should not be understood as a success verb, implying that these monists managed to set right what Melissus' argument entails. Rather the point is conative. The monists overthrow themselves *in the attempt* to take up Melissus' argumentative strategy, successfully or unsuccessfully. We need not, and should not, assume that Polybus took such monists establish anything substantial about Melissus. Rather it is within their own words and discussions, Polybus insists, that his targets undermine themselves and indicate their failure to grasp what it is they claim to know. Adopting Melissus' strategy of supplemental argumentation is the source of their failure and the indicator of their ignorance.

²⁰ Barnes, 1982, p. 236.

It is worth noting that there is a notable overlap between these two arguments. Perhaps Polybus is not offering this first chapter as supplemental in the way Melissus does, yet both aim for conclusions that are ultimately indirect and suggestive rather than probative. Polybus has not shown that the monists are wrong to adopt such a position, but simply that their means of demonstration are self-undermining and point to their ignorance and illicit intrusion into medicine. The monists then cannot be reasonably thought knowers and their conclusions irrelevant to the human person. Melissus' argument achieves much the same result. Pluralism is not eliminated from contention, but its advocates are shown to have no good reason to adopt such a position, resulting in something bearing a close resemblance to the claim that this view is self-undermining. Having no good reason to believe p and believing p at the very least approaches contradiction. We might then ask whether Polybus has fallen into his own trap by offering the epistemically centred argument we have attributed to him. Would someone who *knew* monism was false confine himself to such an indirect argument? I leave this question open.

I conclude by offering one final suggestion on the impact of Melissus' use of the strategy of supplemental argument.²¹ I have noted above that Gorgias' *Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ περὶ φύσεως* seems to be a deliberate perversion of the title of Melissus' book, *Περὶ φύσεως ἢ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος*. We might extend this comparison to the structure of Gorgias' work. Sextus summarises as follows:

Γοργίας δὲ ὁ Λεοντῖνος ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ μὲν τάγματος ὑπῆρχε τοῖς ἀνηρηκόσι τὸ κριτήριον, οὐ κατὰ τὴν ὁμοίαν δὲ ἐπιβολὴν τοῖς περὶ τὸν Πρωταγόραν. ἐν γὰρ τῷ ἐπιγραφομένῳ περὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ περὶ φύσεως

²¹ It is worth noting that B8, although clearly the most prominent example in Melissus' fragments of this strategy, is far from the only example. B6 on uniqueness seems a supplemental, hypothetical consideration of a predicate already deduced in B4 and B5. The fascinating example of a change by a single hair in B7 also may be best read as a vividly presented, supplemental argument intended to reinforce Melissus' more direct arguments targeting alteration on the basis of the impossibility of generation from what-is-not.

τρία κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς κεφάλαια κατασκευάζει, ἐν μὲν καὶ πρῶτον ὅτι οὐδὲν ἔστιν, δεύτερον ὅτι εἰ καὶ ἔστιν, ἀκατάληπτον ἀνθρώπῳ, τρίτον ὅτι εἰ καὶ καταληπτόν, ἀλλὰ τοί γε ἀνέξοιστον καὶ ἀνερμήνευτον τῷ πέλας.

Gorgias of Leontini belonged to the same party as those who abolish the criterion, although he did not adopt the same line of attack as Protagoras. For in his book entitled *Concerning the Non-existent or Concerning Nature* he tries to establish successively three main points—firstly, that nothing exists; secondly, that even if anything exists it is inapprehensible by man; thirdly, that even if anything is apprehensible, yet of a surety it is inexpressible and incommunicable to one's neighbour. (Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* VII.65) Text and Trans. R.G. Bury.

The three-part structure Sextus describes is surely different in kind from Melissus' B8, or the appendices Polybus criticises. A single, primary thesis is not treated to different attempts at demonstration; Gorgias' approach is destructive. However, the structure of multiple, more or less independent, concessive arguments, does seem to establish a link with Melissus and Polybus's disputants.

Melissus has been called as eristic, best understood in the context of sophistry.²² Perhaps this overstates the point and unfairly distances Melissus from a commitment to his arguments. However, that the structure of Melissus' book had a significant influence on the construction of the arguments of the sophists seems a plausible thesis and further secured by Polybus' understanding of Melissus' *logos*. His disputants, in attempting to establish Melissus' *logos*, are demonstrate the extent of his impact, and it is notable that this is independent of his monism.

²² See Palmer (2009).

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