

Parmenides-Plato: (Musical) Ontology

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Abstract: *Aurel Stroe is one of the few Romanian composers after Enescu who was privileged to extract the essence of his sonorous universe from extended cultural areas, which in fact feed the highest quality ethos. Parmenides was considered by some researchers as the first great idealist, being the first to distinguish between the material and the immaterial, specifying the fact that reality cannot be known only through the senses: this leads to the central concept of BEING, seen as immutable, eternal, unique, homogeneous and indivisible reality. Aurel Stroe insisted in his lectures and courses on the ontological identity of the work of art, being one of the few composers who discuss its being.*

Key-words: *ontology, modernism, philosophy, principles, being.*

1. Introduction

Aurel Stroe is one of the few Romanian composers after Enescu who was privileged to extract the essence of his sonorous universe from extended cultural areas, which in fact feed the highest quality ethos. These are not justifications of a universe which needs props (as it is the case in certain situations), but – on the contrary – these are the consequences of the opening of a personality of great spiritual, cultural, scientific and musical amplitude, which can only be manifest in a multi-layered and pluri-cultural way in his art. In order to obtain an ontological perspective of his creation and thinking, a deeper philosophical approach of his art is needed.

The Eleatic school is a Greek philosophical movement with an idealistic tendency dating from the 6th-5th centuries B.C., whose main representatives were

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Zenon and Parmenides, who formulated the metaphysical conception according to which the world diversity and movement are simple sensorial illusions, while the true “existence” is cognizable only through reason, as unique, immutable, continuous and unchanging (dex online).

For the members of the Eleatic school there is nothing but the unique, indivisible, unborn and undying Existence, which homogeneous, unmoved and unaffected by development and change. The Eleatic philosophers were influenced by Pythagoreanism: everything is one is of Pythagorean origin.

2. Ontological concepts and their reflection in Aurel Stroe’s music:

2.1. Parmenides and Ontology: The Poem

Parmenides (approx. 510 – the end of 5th century B.C.) is a member of the school of Eleatic philosophy (which he founded and which would later influence Plato), represented by other thinkers as well, such as Zenon of Elea. It appears that his education was Pythagorean, but he exposed the principles of the philosophical school to which the poem “About nature” (Peri physis) belonged, out of which only 154 verses survive. *“Deux observations generales sur ces contextes contemporains de lecture du Poeme de Parmenide. La premiere est que ces deux etudes ont reussi a degager des sens philosophiques actuels du Poeme qui provoquent l’adhesion du lecteur contemporain par leur coherence philosophique interne et la tonalite actuelle des instruments conceptuels d’analyse”* [Two general observations concern the contemporary reading contexts for Parmenides’ Poem. The first refers to the fact that these two studies managed to reveal the current philosophical meanings of the Poem which determined the contemporary reader’s adherence to them through their internal philosophical coherence and the current tonality of the conceptual instruments of analysis. (our translation)] (Lafrance 1993, 122).

Parmenides was considered by some researchers as the first great idealist, being the first to distinguish between the material and the immaterial, specifying the fact that reality cannot be known only through the senses: this leads to the central concept of BEING, seen as immutable, eternal, unique, homogeneous and indivisible reality. By contrast, the ephemeral, daily reality was considered changing, subject to temporality, cognizable through the senses. The being is

unique and it is everything, thus nothing is outside the being. The being exists, the nonbeing does not. If we accept that the being transforms, then it means that it will become nonbeing.

Parmenides contradicts Heraclites from Ephesus for whom the principle of becoming is the logos, while reality is the fight among oppositions. These two great thinkers open two roads, always in opposition, which all the other philosophers will walk on, and together they encompass the universe of the human spirit: being and becoming.

In the prologue to the poem “About nature”, Parmenides dissociates two important PARADOXICAL paths towards knowledge. Unity is brought about by reason (the path of Truth), plurality is brought about by the data from the senses (the path of Opinion). It is possible to choose one way or another:

1. the path of Persuasion, to which it gives absolute value, because it accompanies the truth (“it is and it is impossible for it not to be”). For Parmenides, the being is eternal and undying, it is unique because of its self-identity and is not affected by variations. The **intelligible** (reason) entails what exists, that is the being in itself.

2. the path of Opinion (“it is not and it must not be”) belongs to common people, disorder and movement, appearance, all are the result of sensations, of **sensitivity** (it admits what is becomes, the apparent being). Sensations are misleading, they cannot generate knowledge. Parmenides despised everything that was outside scientific reasoning.

Parmenides’ central principle is the Being (what it is and can only be), for which the past and the future make no sense, it representing the only reality, the only one which truly exists. Nonbeing leads nowhere.

2.2. The dialogue PARMENIDES by PLATO

Parmenides (or About ideas) (Platon 1989, 49-157) (in Old Greek Παρμενίδης) is a dialogue written by Plato, the most mysterious of his works, which marks the transition from earlier dialogues to the maturity of later dialogues, the dialogues of old age. *Parmenides* is one of the most subtle and most contradictory Platonic dialogues. The dialogue has two parts.

The first part of the dialogue presents the discussion between Socrates, Parmenides and Zeno about forms in themselves, about ideas in themselves –

theory which Plato seems to turn away from. The essential questions are: how do things contribute to the Shapes? Does Shape make thinking as such possible? How do mortals gain access to real knowledge?

The second part of the dialogue brings into discussion the hypothesis of the existence of One: One is not whole and does not have parts, it does not have an end or a middle, it does not accept equality or inequality, it does not accept temporal determiners. One contains plurality in it. One is made up of parts. As Being, One is one and plural, limited and unlimited, identical and different. If there is no One, there is nothing.

Some of the philosophical conclusions of the Platonic dialogue, according to Aristotle (which represents Parmenides' perspective) (ginat-filosofie.blogspot.com) include: clear debate of ontological problems, the conclusion that the Universe consists of a single nature (that-which-is is One), the approach to the conceptual One, taking into consideration *that-which-is-not* (nothingness, nonbeing) along with *that-which-is* (existence), the idea according to which *nothing comes out of nothing and nothing is lost – it only appears like that to us* (Aristotle), the fact that there is only one reason (the one determined by One) – in direct relation to the Divine: *“The Divine holds such power that it is absolutely perfect. We can never control such power, and we cannot know it. We are not capable of knowing anything about the Divine through our knowledge”* (our translation) (Platone 2019, 5).

Ontology contains the distinction between the being as subject and its attributes, between the being and the existence. *“If it is impossible that the difference be similar and the similarity – different, it is impossible for many beings to exist; because, if there were more, they would suffer from what they could not be”* (our translation) (Plato, 1988, 3).

Musical ontology also starts from Parmenide's dictum (515–445 B. C.), ALL IS ONE: *“influenced by the logical, scientific thinking of Pythagoras, Parmenides employs deductive reasoning in an attempt to uncover the true physical nature of the world. His investigations lead him to take the opposite view to that of Heraclitus”* (Law 2007, 41). The thought process of the musical phenomenon is paramount in the ontological approach, relating to the work of art: *“fundamental musical ontology should be descriptivist rather than revisionary, that is, that it should describe how we think about musical works, rather than how they are independently of our thought about them”* (Kania 2008, 426).

The philosophical discourse connected with the musical act is an important component of thinking about the sound artwork: *“the ontological nature of works of music has been a particularly lively area of philosophical debate during the past few years”* (Dodd 2008, 11-13). From the premise that something exists (“It is”), Parmenides deduces that it cannot also not exist (“It is not”), as this would involve a logical contradiction: a state of nothing existing is impossible—there can be no void, (...) everything that is real must be eternal unchanging, and must have an indivisible unity— “all is one”. The conclusion of this system of thought is that we cannot trust the experience of the senses.

As predecessors, in the sixth century BC Pythagoras had based his system of thought on mathematical structures, but a hundred years later Heraclitus said that everything is mobile, flowing. As a result of Parmenides' philosophical experience, Zeno of Elea had come to represent his paradoxes to demonstrate the illusory nature of experience. In the fourth century, Plato supported his theory of forms, abstract ideas being the highest forms of reality in his conception. In the twentieth century (1927), Martin Heidegger (Being and Time) revitalizes the concept of BEING.

Any musical tradition has connected the concrete musical act (compositional or interpretive) with the analytical, musicological act because understanding the meaning of music is vital: outside of it there is no music, it does not achieve its purpose. *“Music was considered as something that could not be reduced to its structure or notation but could be associated with much broader contexts. (...) By answering the question, “What is music as such?” differently, they developed different views on issues such as the relationship of music and emotion, the role of music in society, the symbolization of music, and so on”* (Park 2017, 417–430).

Musical ontology refers specifically to musical performance and its relation to the score: *“many recent philosophers of music have thought it interesting, and possibly even useful, to try to say what sort of thing a musical work is, to specify, for example, the conditions that a performance must satisfy if it is to count as a performance of the work it purports to instantiate. They have thought it self-evidently worthwhile, in other words, to raise questions about musical ontology; and they have thought that answers to those questions might facilitate, or even be required for, reflection on apparently adjacent areas of interest, such as musical performance”* (Ridley 2003, 203).

The concept that a musical work is similar to its score is not supported by the interpretation and understanding of the artwork: this whole will never consist of separate sections. Its unity will be above any analysis, unfolding into component elements or graphically noted documents. *“The authentic performance movement is a phenomenon of the last twenty years (...). Not surprisingly, the authentic performance movement has raised a hue and cry among performers and musicologists, since it challenges entrenched traditions of performance. Very recently some philosophers also have turned their attention to the subject of authentic performance. The ontology of musical works has also attracted the interest of philosophers in the past twenty years. There is an important connection between any theory of the ontology of musical works and a specification of the characteristics which must be exhibited in an authentic performance of a musical work, though this connection has not received much comment in the literature (but see Levinson 1987). If an authentic performance is (at least) an accurate performance of a work, then theories of musical ontology should tell us the type and range of properties which must be produced in an authentic performance of a work”* (Davies 1991, 21-41).

If “the two paths (concepts) created by Parmenides are persuasion (the being in itself) and the opinion of mortals (the determined being), in Plato we distinguish between *kosmos noetos* and *kosmos aisthetos*” (our translation) (Vlăduțescu 1998, 7). All of these correspond to the two terms of ontology: being and existence. But we can reach the truth only by reaching the being. Aurel Stroe insisted in his lectures and courses on the ontological identity of the work of art, being one of the few composers who discuss its being: *“these are precisely the main concerns of musical ontology: what is wanted is both an adequate concept of the musical work and adequate criteria of musical work identity”* (Nussbaum 2012, 274).

3. Conclusions

“Almost a century and a half ago, the efforts of modern philologists brought to light a sensational discovery: six fragments of an antique commentary, which was lost, to the dialogue Parmenides by Plato – (...) the most important missing link in a chain which connects late Greek philosophy with Latin and Arab Medieval thinking, with

influences up to the Modern era” (our translation) (Porfir 2010, 12). Parmenides created philosophical ideas in his path, ideas which also blossomed in Aurel Stroe’s musical thinking; and not in any way, but by giving rise to masterpieces which marked Romanian art in the second half of the 20th century. *“Plato scholars have thought that Plato’s interest in Eleaticism is confined to his later period, finding the first evidence of it (and of Eleatic influence) in the Parmenides itself”* (Curd 1998, 228).

Music ontology remains one of the modern ways of understanding music, which made a career in the 20th century, but also in the theoretical-philosophical argumentation of maestro Aurel Stroe. *“Musical reality is inseparable and interactive with our musical experience in this framework: musical reality is not defined by abstract structure but mapped into a dynamic combination of shēng and yīn; musical experience is not alienated from the realm of musical reality but is understood as an interactive participant in musical reality”* (Park 2017, 23).

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