Amēkhaníē in Parmenides DK 28 B 6.5

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The paper examines closer the notion expressed by the word *amēkhaníē* in DK 6. 5. In his analysis of problematic of knowledge Parmenides alerts about *amekhaníē* of mortals, a word generally translated with `lack of resources` or 'perplexity', a kind of problem that drives the thinking astray. Scholars point out in many passages of the poem the opposition between imperfect mortals and the *eidóta phōta* of DK 1. 3, the wise man. However, as much as I know, nobody noticed that, if mortals have a lack of resources, the goddess is teaching exactly how to fix it with a kind of method given through her precepts, which are an authentic *mēchané*. The paper shows that this is the genuine didactic aim of Parmenides, as he says in 1.28-30, i.e., to point out where is the error of mortals and how the wise man fixes it. Starting from a reinterpretation of 1.29 and following with the analysis of fr. 6, the paper shows that the method of fr. 2 is indeed the *mēchané* that can do that. Although the word is not present in the poem, it is one of its main topics. It seems (by the extant fragments) Parmenides had no clear word to call his *mēchané*, a psychological cognitive tool we call today principle of non-contradiction.

I will speak, in this paper[1], about one word, which is not present in Parmenides' poem. The reason for its absence may be either that Parmenides had never written it or that it was lost with much of the rest of the poem. In either case, in my opinion, it deserves the attention of scholars. To study a word that is not there could seem a philological absurdity, and of course, philology attends, first of all, to words that are there. However, in some cases, as for example, with the reconstruction of lacking parts of a papyrus, hypotheses are made and proposals are elaborated. In our case, the lacking part is not a piece of papyrus or medieval parchment or any other physical object; in our case, the lacking part is of a conceptual nature. Thus, my aim is to offer a conjecture that I would like to justify by appealing to a pervasive feature of the poem's philosophical architecture.

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[1] I would like to thank Christopher Kurfess for correcting my translation to English of the original Portuguese.

I shall adopt the following methodological premise: the poem presents many oppositions, either of notions stated in precise terms, as for example, being and non-being, or notions indirectly formulated by more complex images, such as the Persuasion that accompanies Truth in opposition to the opinion in which there is no true conviction. Given this game of oppositions, we may encounter a notion whose presence leads us to expect a correlated, opposite notion. Hence, methodologically, even in the absence of the opposing term, we can – as an assumption – raise it as hypothesis to test against our understanding of the poem. This is the methodology used here and I hope that the result is convincing.

Oppositions. In fr. DK 28 B 1, vv. 28-30, Parmenides presents his didactic program: the disciple will learn the thinking of true persuasion as much as the thinking of opinions in which there is no true persuasion. Parmenides puts these two positions in a kind of opposition using the correlatives *ēmén* and *ēdé*. Then, he fulfills the promise and, in fr. DK B 2 speaks about a path of Persuasion that accompanies Truth, whereas we find opinions of mortals, in which there is no true conviction, illustrated in fr. DK B 6. If the conceptual opposition is straightforward and clear, i.e., a notion of truth that opposes a notion of opinion, the opposition between the poetical or philosophical figures employed is neither straightforward nor clear. At 1.29 Parmenides speaks of ἠμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμὲς ἦτορ, which in literal translation means 'the intrepid heart of well-rounded truth', where 'intrepid heart' should be understood as 'mind that does not vacillate', i.e., a mind that is not in doubt[2]. It is very important to keep in mind that the goddess is not teaching the Truth, as the idealistic interpretation (from Hegel on) wants to understand these words, but the true discourse. In fact, when she teaches the two ways in fr. 2, speaking about the first way she says that it is a way of Persuasion (which refers to a convincing discourse), that kind of persuasion that accompanies Truth, i.e., the true persuasion: the central topic of the teaching is Persuasion, not Truth (cf. Galgano, 2012).

In the verse 1.30 Parmenides explicitly mentions persons as the subjects who have opinions: mortals; but we do not clearly know who is the person that has the 'well-rounded truth'. In 1.30 there are many mortals convinced of something, but in their conviction there is no reliability: ἠδὲ βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής. If we wanted to find the person in possession of the true persuasion of 1.29, where in the poem should we seek? Here the problem

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[2] For the translation of ἦτορ as 'mind' see Galgano (2012), where I argue that this word was never used as a metaphor of 'central point' or 'central part' ('nucleus', 'essence'), as scholars want to see in this verse.

becomes more complicated. In fact, scholars prefer to see an opposition between the character of *brotoí* and that of the *eidōs phōs* of fr. 1.3. We will see that such juxtaposition is valid but not sufficient. However, before proceeding, let us make our point and try to understand how we can make these oppositions clear.

The goddess will teach to her disciple two notions, one is a reliable persuasion, the other is an unreliable persuasion; the unreliable persuasion is that of *brotoí*, the reliable one is that which accompanies truth. Hence, the question is: who is the character that carries the persuasion that accompanies truth? And one more question: what is the difference between one who has true persuasion and one who has unreliable opinion?

eidōs phōs x brotoí. Parmenides offers an explanation about how human process of thinking thinks the truth, a kind of explanation that we could call psychological-cognitivist. He says that, for any given belief, the one who is convinced of it believes that he is right, and takes his conviction as truth. From a subjective point of view, each one of us, if we are convinced of the truth of anything, believes that this conviction reflects reality, even if it is not true, i.e., even if we are in error. This notion does not originate with Parmenides. It is older and we can find it in one of his masters, Xenophanes, who says (fr. DK 21 B 16): *Ethiopians <say that their gods are>snub-nosed and black; Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired* (tr. Lesher, 2001). In this case, the problem is huge, for if someone tells a story and says it is true, that story might be true but also might not be. It might also happen that the teller is not a liar because he believes what he is saying in good faith. Faced with any statement, we are not facing the truth of that statement but facing the persuasiveness that that statement is true. That is, between the statement and its objective truth there is a mediator: persuasion.

In the verses 1.28-30 Parmenides says that the disciple shall learn both the true persuasion and the untrue persuasion. So the *eidōs phōs*, taking for granted that the disciple is one, as it seems we can infer from the first verses of fr. 1, still does not know how to distinguish one from the other. It is precisely what the goddess will teach him. This passage is very important and I think that it requires careful explication. That the truth was a privilege of gods was a notion belonging to the traditional Homeric and Hesiodic culture. That it could be a question discussed by scholars and wise men seems to be a new feature of Parmenides' time. Actually, the new knowledge began to cross the boundaries of immediate, practical concerns – the limited knowledge of the skilled *sophistēs* – into the ambits where mythical thought had its dominion:

the order of the world as a whole. When Alcmaeon (fr. DK 24 B1) says that only the gods have certainty of both unseen and mortal things, whereas men can only conjecture, he is raising and making explicit a problem that was not a problem before him, but a given: gods know, men don't know. In the traditional view, men, in their human condition, are in contraposition to the immortal gods. For example, in Homer (*Il.* 5.440) we find: *"never the same is the breed of gods; who are immortal, and men* (τ' ἀνθρώπων) *who walk groundling"* (tr. Lattimore, 1951). That is, the two races are incomparable. Alcmaeon makes the comparison between men and gods just to signal that difference; Xenophanes does the same when he says (DK 21 B 34) that true knowledge is for gods alone, whereas to man (ἀνήρ) only opinion is given. Whereas in the epic thought the races of gods and men are incomparable, in the thought of the VI to V century a comparison appears: divine knowledge is perfect, human knowledge imperfect. Whereas the Olympic religion is founded on the separation between human and divine realms, and whereas the religion of the various mystery cults had the tendency to join them, the new Ionian naturalism, followed by the Italic naturalism, wanted to go beyond that separation, trying to supply the ἀμηχανίη (as we will see below) of the human condition with knowledge. This knowledge, still conjectural in Xenophanes and Alcmaeon, becomes a knowledge of true certainty in Parmenides. To fulfill this program of true knowledge, Parmenides presents as his starting point, the limited human condition, using the traditional language of his culture; thus, the traditional human condition receives a traditional name, βροτοὶ, mortals[3].

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[3] There is a synonymy between 8. 38-39, ὄνομ(α) ... βροτοὶ κατέθεντο, and 19. 3, ὄνομ' ἄνθρωποι κατέθεντο, as Cordero notes (1984, p. 149, n. 157). However, the fact that Parmenides uses them as synonyms in this case does not mean that they are synonyms all cases. In fact, Parmenides uses βροτο*ί* four times (1. 30, 6. 4, 8. 39, 8. 61) and one time the adjective βροτείας (8. 51), all of them exclusively associated with the straying of thought from the true knowledge (1. 30: "βροτῶν δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής"; 6. 4: "βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν"; 8. 39: "πάντ' ὄνομ(α) ἔσται, ὅσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ,"; 8. 51: "δόξας δ' ἀπὸ τοῦδε βροτείας μάνθανε κόσμον ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἀπατηλὸν ἀκούων."; 8. 61: "ὡς οὐ μή ποτέ τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμη παρελάσσηι"). On the other hand, ἄνθρωποι is used in a much more general sense: in 1. 27 "τήνδ' ὁδόν (ἦ γὰρ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου ἐστίν)", where '*path of men*', despite the imaginative explanations of many scholars, likely means 'path of humans' (different from path of animals or things – wind, waters, etc.), i.e., a road; in 16. 2 and 16. 3: "τὼς νόος ἀνθρώποισι παρίσταται" and "τὸ γὰρ αὐτό ἔστιν ὅπερ φρονέει μελέων φύσις ἀνθρώποισιν", which, for the fact that they are anatomical-physiological descriptions, necessarily refer to men in general (wise and not wise); in 19. 3, where, as we saw above, it has a meaning synonymous to βροτοὶ. Thus, restraining just to the use made by Parmenides in the extant fragments, we can conclude that the term ἄνθρωποι includes the meaning of βροτο*ί*, but not vice-versa.

From this starting point Parmenides goes further, much further than Xenophanes and Alcmaeon; he says that true knowledge is something possible for men, and he makes a goddess say that. This is also a step further for the *eidōs phōs*; actually, the man who knows (the *eidōs phōs* not yet instructed by the goddess) knows – as Alcmaeon and Xenophanes knew – that he will get access just to opinion and not to the truth, whereas *brotoí*, i.e., ordinary men, did not even know that. But, what the Parmenidean goddess is asking is exactly for the *eidōs phōs* to go further, to know more, to learn true knowledge. Hence, we must conclude that the character that opposes the *brotoí* is the disciple <u>after</u> having learned from the goddess the art of divine knowledge.

ἀμηχανίη. Having determined who the characters are, now we must find the difference between them. We already know that it is something that the goddess will teach, but for a better understanding, we need to follow the description of these qualifications given by Parmenides himself. Thus, I believe that it would be better to see, first of all, what description is given of *brotoí*, and, afterward, what description is given of the new teaching; a teaching that will guarantee the truth of a conviction, and hence allow the knowing man to know, as gods do, the truth of things.

The description of *brotoí* is given in fr. 6. 4-9:

ἧνδὴ βροτοὶ εἰδότες οὐδὲν
πλάττονται, δίκρανοι· ἀμηχανίη γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶν
στήθεσιν ἰθύνει πλακτὸν νόον· οἱ δὲ φοροῦνται
κωφοὶ ὁμῶς τυφλοί τε, τεθηπότες, ἄκριτα φῦλα,
οἷς τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταὐτὸν νενόμισται
κοὐ ταὐτόν, πάντων δὲ παλίντροπός ἐστι κέλευθος.

Mortals[4] know nothing (εἰδότες οὐδὲν), have two heads and follow forged ways (πλάττονται) because a lack of resources (ἀμηχανίη) in their mind (στήθεσιν) drives an errant thinking. For this reason, they are people incapable of discernment, and go alike deaf, blind and confused, because they think that to be and not to be are the same and not the same and their path

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[4] Who are mortals in this context? A complete review for older scholarship may be found in Zeller (1967, p. 173-183, n. 3 of G. Reale). Debate has focused mainly on the identification of βροτοί with Heracliteans. Patin 1899, considered the whole poem as an anti-Heraclitean polemic, while Zeller himself opposed the identification. Allowing that 'conclusive proof' on the matter is not available, Guthrie thinks some echo of Heraclitus is likely. The debated ground has been that of vocabulary supposed to be Heraclitean (the highlight was Calogero, who in the expression δίκρανοι saw the carved image of Heraclitus!), and also problems of chronology. This polemic was overcome when Mansfeld (1960) made clear that the vocabulary used by Parmenides already belonged to the tradition of lyric poetry.

has two directions. Firstly, we note that Parmenides provides a description of the mental behavior of mortals, who are not described in their fatal condition of inferiority to gods, nor are they described either in their existential misery or any other moralistic meaning. His description is not connected to any specific human context, to any specific situation or event; it is directed at the mental behavior of *brotoí* but is made in a neutral and universal form.

Let us consider the particular terms of this passage. 'Mortals who know nothing" is apparently a formulation that opposes 'the man who knows', as we already have seen. Actually, Parmenides says what the problem that makes mortals to know nothing is. He says that the reason for that is a lack of resources (ἀμηχανίη[5]) in their mind. Parmenides is very precise: the problem is not a generic mortal condition but a specific lack in their mind. This lack in their mind is the origin of their behavior. This is the theme of the entire critical discourse of Parmenides: the lack of resource in the mind.

πλάττονται, δίκρανοι. Mortals have two heads, that is, have duplicity, as Capizzi (1975, p. 37) well translates, and forge their mental paths. As is known, πλάττονται is a controversial word and the majority of scholars translates 'stray' or something similar; I don't hesitate to translate 'forge', accepting the translation of Cordero who very properly reminds us of the use of Plato in the *Timaeus*, where Critias says: "not forged myth but true discourse" " (μὴ πλασθέντα μῦθον ἀλλ' ἀληθινὸν λόγον). (Cordero, 1984, pp. 147-8 and 2005, pp. 146-7, with full philological discussion). The translation 'they forge' makes more sense, as we will see below[6].

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[5] Artfully adapted from its uses in epic and lyric, where it commonly denotes human incapacity in opposition to divine power, the term ἀμηχανίη in Parmenides has added meaning. In the epic and lyric tradition, the cognate is found in many forms (verb, simple and composite nouns, adjective and with *alpha privative*); ἀμηχανίη receives by all scholars the interpretation of an incapacity of mortals, a human impotency, in opposition to the divine power. Some scholars translate adopting the general meaning of lack of resources, as for example: Beaufret (1955, p. 81), "l'absence de moyens"; Rietzler-Gadamer (1970, p. 29) "Hilflosigkeit"; Somville (1976, p. 42) "l'impuissance" (p. 17). Some other scholars prefer to translate as 'perplexity', for example: Coxon (2009, p. 58) "perplexity"; Casertano (1978, p. 17) "incertezza"; Untersteiner (1979, p. 135) "perplessità".

[6] Following Diels, who notes the Aldine edition of 1526, many scholars accept a πλάττονται as coming from πλάζω (LSJ: *turn aside* or *away from*; the LSJ includes the Parmenidean πλάττονται in the entry πλάζω) rather than πλάσσω (LSJ: *mould*, *form*; and metaphorically: *fabricate*, *forge*). Whereas πλάζω would mean a human wandering, πλάσσω would mean a fantasizing, i,e., an inventing explanations. Among those who accept πλάζω, we have Diels, Barnes, Burnet, Coxon, Ruggiu, Tarán, Untersteiner, Verdenius, Zafiropulo. Among the few who favor πλάσσω are Cordero, Cerri, Ferrari, O'Brien, and Santoro.

ἰθύνει πλακτὸν νόον. What happens with this lack of resource in the mind? What does the ἀμηχανίη ἐν αὐτῶν στήθεσιν do? It drives thinking to wander (πλακτὸν νόον [7]), i.e., ensures that thinking does not follow a right path, but wanders. This wandering produces ways that the mind fabricates; that is, the wandering that comes from ἀμηχανίη is the effect of a confusion, as he will say in the next verses. Hence the paths in the mind (i.e., those thoughts by which mortals are persuaded) are forged, invented and have no relationship to true paths, that is, those paths of persuasion that go with the truth. There is a very important point that we have to highlight here. When Parmenides speaks about mind, he does not speak *sensu lato* nor about knowledge or the whole cognitive process, which implicates the three moments, 'one who knows, the knowing and what is known'. Parmenides does not speak in any of these meanings. He speaks instead of thinking in action, hence of the mechanism of knowing and only of that. Unfortunately, the word that he uses is so evident that in general it is not seen: ἀμηχανίη is the lack of a certain mechanism of thinking that produces all the effects listed in the next verses. To better specify this point, a more precise translation for the accusative νόον would be "cognitive operations of the mind"; this is a point, however, which we will have to discuss on a later occasion.

οἱ δὲ φοροῦνται κωφοὶ ὁμῶς τυφλοί. This set of words refers to the same notion and the most important term, which also gives the core meaning, is ὁμῶς, alike[8]. The grammatical subject οἱ refers to *brotoí*, who are conducted (φοροῦνται), alike deaf and blind. That means, they are not deaf and blind, but it is as if they were. The verb φοροῦνται, here a passive form of φορέω, points out one more time the ἀμηχανίη of the mind that leads the *brotoí*, The ἀμηχανίη is the real cause of their being conducted. Why does the mind without resources lead men as though they

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[7] Diels makes both πλάττονται and πλακτὸν cognates of the same semantic family: 'wander'. However, I accept πλάττονται from πλάσσω, with the meaning of 'forge', whereas πλακτός is the Parmenidean poetical form of πλαγκτός, a cognate adjective of πλάζω. Here the distinction can be understood noting that πλάττονται refers to *brotoí*, whereas πλακτὸν refers to νόον. That means, the thoughts in the mind wander, and the result of this lack of discipline in the behavior of mortals' mind is the invention of myths (as Plato says) in order to explain the world. It is very important that we remind the syntax, in fact, mortals forge *because* (γάρ) thoughts wander.

[8] Most scholars, maybe assuming a metaphorical meaning, translate, following Diels-Kranz (1989, p. 233) "zugleich". For example: "at once" (Palmer, 2009, p. 114); "ad un tempo" (Reale, 1991, p. 95); "tão surdos como cegos" (Santoro, 2011, p. 91). Some scholars translate in a different way, for example: "deaf and blind alike in bewilderment" (Coxon, p. 58, who binds ὁμῶς to τεθηπότες). Finally, some of them translate, in my opinion rightly, 'similar', 'alike', for example: "deaf alike and blind" (Barnes, 1982, p. 124); "deaf and blind alike" (Long, 1975, p. 85) and "como surdos e cegos" (Cavalcante de Souza, 1978, p. 142).

were deaf and blind? The mind of mortals works with '*wandering thoughts* (thought=cognitive operation)' (πλακτὸν νόον) because it has a lack of a tool (ἀμηχανίη) that could be used to make an artifice. The lack of this tool makes the mortal act alike deaf and blind, i.e., as though they were insensitive, without the help of the senses, lacking in perception. In these words of Parmenides, the discovery of the role of mind in the perception of reality is very clear. Mortals have eyes and ears, but without a certain kind of tool in their mind they seem not to have them. Thus, the censure here is against a certain kind of mental behavior, which is like a lack of sensation, meaning it is like a lack of data that come from reality in order to build a correct path in the mind.

τεθηπότες, ἄκριτα φῦλα. We have here two more notions that are clearly psychological. Τεθηπότες, confused, is a psychological condition that can be interpreted in many ways, but all of them ultimately refer to an absence of mental sharpness[9]. This is the stunning that comes from the condition like deafness and blindness, which makes *brotoí* a specific human type, ἄκριτα φῦλα, people without the capacity to perform the required κρίσις, i.e. the distinction between being and non-being, because they consider being and not to be as the same and not the same. Hence, *cognitive operations* wander because they have a lack of a mental tool that makes possible the distinction between being and not to be.

πάντων δὲ παλίντροπός ἐστι κέλευθος. Without that resource, thoughts in their mind (*cognitive operations*) have no right direction and hence '*the path of all is backward turning*', as many scholars approximately translate. However, more than backward turning, I think it would be better translated by 'counter-direction', which conveys better the idea of the conflict between being and not to be that Parmenides wants to highlight[10]. We have here a psychological vocabulary in order to describe a mental behavior – here typically cognitive, since it is related to

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[9] Ruggiu (1975, p. 143): "L'accostamento del concetto parmenideo con *Odissea* XXIII.105 è istruttivo: nel brano omerico, lo 'sbalordimento' impedisce a Penelope di profferire parola: οὐδέ τι προσφάσθαι δύναμαι ἔπος οὐδ' ἐρέεσθαι οὐδ' εἰς ὦπα ἰδέσθαι ἐναντίον. Si tratta cioè di una forma di stordimento che impedisce insieme di vedere e di esprimere in parole…"

[10] An example, already in Homer (reported by LSJ) presents this meaning; in the Iliad (9.56), after the speech of Diomedes, Nestor says: "Not one man of all the Achaians will belittle your words nor speak against them (οὐδὲ πάλιν ἐρέει)" (Tr. Lattimore, 1951).

paths of inquiry – defined as confused, where affirmation and negation are the same and also not the same because of a lack of discernment.

Conclusions

Fragment 6, starting from verse 4, is a description of the mental behavior of *brotoí*, who for the lacking of a certain resource, a kind of faculty of discernment, have a mental behavior as if they were deaf and blind, i.e., they behave in an intellectually confused manner (they are ἄκριτα φῦλα) and when they must explain the world, they contradict themselves (δίκρανοι) and produce fake ways (πλάττονται) of inquiry. Most scholars tend to emphasize the negative aspect, the path that should not be followed, the confusion of mortals, and all of this in opposition to being, to the heart of truth, the signs of which will be presented in fr. 8. Interpretations of this kind come from the assumption that the goddess is teaching the Truth (following the misinterpretation of 1.29, as speaking of Truth's nucleus, heart or essence). However, if we put aside this idealistic interpretation, and give Parmenides back to his times, we see that his teaching refers to the typical researches of that period: the explanation of the world (all things, the *pánta* of 1.29) and its underlying order, the *arkhé*. Accordingly, the teaching must refer to some knowledge that could help the research, as we may infer from the method of fr. 2, and not to the final and eternal result as could be a Truth, in uppercase, in an absolute meaning.

Parmenides then is describing the limitations of mortals in a more concrete and limited context, not drawing a contrast between mortals and divine power, but showing the evidence of a certain lack in the psychological structure of mortals which determines the operations of reasoning. To this lack Parmenides gives the name ἀμηχανίη, making a perfect psychological diagnosis; in fact, all the other phenomena described, which will converge in the lack of discernment, are the result of this mental deficiency: mortals are missing a tool that could lead them along the path of true persuasion. Obviously, the goddess knows and owns this tool, and it is her task to teach it to the disciple; that means that Parmenides, through the voice of the goddess, in her didactic program, wants to teach this authentic μηχανή – this is the word that is not present in the poem, of which I spoke at the beginning – an artificial tool that supplies the lack that mortals (among whom must be included the *kouros*) have.

This μηχανή is a tool that allows us to make distinctions between the true discourse (on the way of Persuasion that accompanies Truth) and opinions of mortals (in which there is no reliable conviction). Therefore, the tool is not itself the Truth, but just a tool for achieving true discourse. In other words, Parmenides (and his masters before him) realized that men make confusion for themselves and accept contradictory tales explaining the same phenomena; given this problem, going beyond his masters, he found out the solution, the method taught in fr. 2. Therefore, mortals' confusion can be corrected distinguishing true and untrue discourses; the correction is made by using something (the method of fr. 2), which is the tool, the μηχανή, that the goddess teaches[11]. That μηχανή could mean a taught and learned tool is a possibility that we can see, a little later, in Democritus[12], who says in fr. DK 68 B 172:

ἀφ' ὧν ἡμῖν τἀγαθὰ γίγνεται,
ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν τούτων καὶ τὰ κακὰ ἐπαυρισκοίμεθ' ἄν,
τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἐκτὸς εἴημεν. αὐτίκα ὕδωρ βαθὺ εἰς πολλὰ
χρήσιμον καὶ δαῦτε κακόν· κίνδυνος γὰρ ἀποπνιγῆναι.
μηχανὴ οὖν εὑρέθη, νήχεσθαι διδάσκειν>.

From the very same things as benefit us we may also get evils, and escape from evils. For example, deep water is useful for many things, and then again bad; for there is danger of drowning. So a remedy has been discovered, teaching people to swim (tr. Taylor, 1999, p. 19).

In this passage, the situation is very similar to the Parmenidean epistemological suggestion; in fact, Democritus prospects two opposite views of the same thing, one viewing it as a good, the other as an evil. This is a general observation where deep water is just an example. What is the right way to proceed when we are confronted with such a choice? We must know a μηχανὴ, a tool that allows us to determine the good way, and, Democritus says, this tool can be taught. The common elements in both philosophers are multiple: the need for a distinction, the necessity of a choice, the (lack of) resource, the teaching and learning of the resource. Therefore, we can reinforce that the word ἀμηχανίη in Parmenides is not used in a generic metaphorical manner to describe mortals in their human misery, but is a concrete evaluation of the level of knowledge of mortals and of their ability to use tools for reasoning.

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[11] In modern terms, Parmenides says that the contradictory way of thinking can be corrected using certain rules of logic (and ontology), such as the principle of non-contradiction. Such a rule is a tool, a μηχανή, an instrument.

[12] I would like to thank prof. Miriam Campolina Diniz Peixoto (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais) who brought to my attention this fragment of Democritus at the 2016 International Association for Presocratic Studies conference in Austin, where I presented a short version of this paper.

For Parmenides, there exists a μηχανή which can be taught and with which mortals can depart from their condition as ἄκριτα φῦλα, can discern between being and not to be and can, finally, distinguish the persuasion in which there is no true conviction from the persuasion that accompanies truth. Therefore the poem has this μηχανή among its main topics. What is this μηχανή? As we have already said, it is taught in the fragment 2: it is a different principle of non-contradiction (different from that of Aristotle), but this will be the topic for a subsequent article.

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