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GABRIELE GIANNANTONI



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## DISCUSSIONI, NOTE E RASSEGNE

DAVID TORRIJOS-CASTRILLEJO

### ANAXAGORAE HOMOEOMERIA

#### *Abstract*

Aristotle introduced in the history of the reception of Anaxagoras the term “homoiomeros”. This word refers to substances whose parts are similar to each other and to the whole. Although Aristotle’s explanations can be puzzling, the term “homoiomeros” may explain an authentic aspect of Anaxagoras’ doctrine reflected in the fragments of his work. Perhaps one should find a specific meaning for the term “homoiomeros” in Anaxagoras, somewhat different from the one present in Aristotle. This requires a review of the sense of the two terms involved in it: “homoios” and “moira”. In other words, the following questions should be answered: what realities are named parts and to what whole do they belong? On the other hand, which similarity do they have to each another and to the whole? The author concludes that the parts are “all things”, which resemble each other and the universe as a whole because, according to Anaxagoras, they are all composed of all things.

#### *Keywords*

Anaxagoras, Aristotle, mixture, whole and part, similarity

The purpose of these pages is to revisit a term that in the history of Anaxagoras’ interpretation has been repeated *ad nauseam*, the word “homoiomereia”. In order to achieve this goal, let us begin with a brief summary of the doctrine of the Presocratic philosopher. Although he belongs to the Ionian tradition, he seeks to integrate the thinking of Parmenides. Anaxagoras wants to explain the change without allowing any truly generation or destruction; hence he supposes that all things were originally mixed. In the mixture, there were all the “things” (χρόματα), which we can see in the world, like colors, flavors, water, earth, biological tissues... However, since none of these realities is generated or is completely destroyed any time, all were already present there. Try to imagine this mix-

ture not as a jumble of stacked objects but rather as different fluids (gaseous substances or liquids) in dissolution.

At one point, the so-called Intellect (Νοῦς) begins to stir the mixture. By being moved in circle, the things start to be differentiated and certain characteristics begin to be observable, until, at a certain moment, the cosmos starts to look as the world that we see today: there appear the sun, the moon, the earth with mountains, rivers, living beings and so forth. However, none of these things is completely new, as their components have always existed within the mixture. This means that the process by which something seems destroyed consists in the passage of something perceptible to an invisible state. In turn, when something seemingly new appears, really, it is something hidden, which becomes exposed. This leads Anaxagoras to the conclusion that the initial mixture substantially remains and that even now “all is in all” (59 B 4b, 6, 11, 12 DK). For example, when something burns, it releases pre-existing fire, when it rains, hidden water in the clouds goes out of them, etc. In fact, the difference between the visible and the hidden lies solely in greater or smaller predominance. Therefore, we should distinguish those “things” that are components of the mixture, which we can name “ingredients”, and the “things” that are predominant and visible in a concrete place, which we can name “substances” (in a non philosophical sense). Any part of the physical world (“substances”) is a section of the original mix, but the proportion in which the “ingredients” occur is changed. Thus, the “substance” that receives the name “water” would not be simply water but a mixture of all “things,” i.e. of all “ingredients,” although in it the “ingredient” water dominates<sup>1</sup>.

When he explains the system of Anaxagoras, Aristotle, who gives us not only ancient but long explanations on this topic, employs the unusual term ὁμοιομερής<sup>2</sup>. Obviously, when he speaks about a “ho-

<sup>1</sup> About the concept of “substances” and “ingredients” in Anaxagoras (according to Strang, C-substances and E-substances respectively), see M. SCHOFIELD, *An Essay on Anaxagoras*, Cambridge 1980, p. 74; C. STRANG, *The Physical Theory of Anaxagoras*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», XLV (1963) p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> On the history of the term, see D. LANZA, *Le omeomerie nella tradizione dossografica di Anassagora*, «La parola del passato», LXXXII (1962) pp. 256-93. Aristotle

moiomorous” substance, he refers to a thing what has “similar parts”. The core of my argument focuses on the translation of this term. Let us reconsider this question: Which “parts” and what kind of “likeness” are involved here? The concept of “part” is naturally related to a whole. There are extensive parts, which make a body endowed with spatial extent. In this sense, the bricks are parts of a wall. Second, there are parts that could be called constitutive; they are previous elements of which something is made, even after its composition can no longer be distinguished. For example, water, milk and coffee are such constituents of milk coffee. In Anaxagoras, the extensive parts are related to the so-called “substances” while the constitutive parts are so to “ingredients”. Also we find similarities between things for different reasons. The most obvious similarity is qualitative: two green apples are similar for their color. However, while two things do not have any qualitative likeness at all, we could estimate that they share a similarity if we can see in both the same state, such as motion or rest.

The scholars commonly understand that the Aristotelian adjective ὁμοιομερής designates uniform substances, i.e. those whose parts are mutually similar and also resemble the whole. The skin on our head is similar to the skin of the arms and also resembles the skin of the whole body. However, there are also no-homoiomorous (anhomoiomorous) substances, as the human body taken in its entirety, because it integrates not only skin but also hair, eyes, etc., i.e., parts mutually unlike and different of the whole too. Note that, in this case, the term “anhomoiomorous” is referred to the parts of the body, which are both extensive and have a qualitative difference. This explanation agrees with the use of ὁμοιομερής by Aristotle when he uses it for his own research. Now, Aristotle also used it to expose the doctrine of Anaxagoras. According to him, Anaxagoras would have considered the very ingredients of the mixture as homoio-

had not used the noun ὁμοιομέρεια that appears first in Epicurus, but only the adjective ὁμοιομερής. According to Wigodsky, the word ὁμοιομέρεια could be conceived by Theophrastus: M. WIGODSKY, *Homoiotetes, Stoicheia and Homoioimerieiai in Epicurus*, «The Classical Quarterly», LVII (2007) p. 537. About the origin of the term, see also *infra*, note 5.

ous substances<sup>3</sup>. In other words, substances such as skin, blood, bone, etc. would be original, i.e. the most basic constituents of Anaxagorean mixture, “elements” in the terminology of Aristotle. Nevertheless, this only would help us to know which ones are the ingredients of Anaxagoras’ mixture, a matter we are not concerned with at this time.

More interesting is the way in which Aristotle says that Anaxagoras establishes «infinite elements» (*Phys.* Γ 4.203a20) from «similar parts» (ἐκ τῶν ὁμοιομερῶν: *ibid.* 21), because there is «a mixture for parts as for the whole» (ὅτι οὖν τῶν μορίων εἶναι μίγμα ὁμοίως τῷ παντί: *ibid.* 23f.). Note that these words, the same that are present in the term ὁμοιομερής, already do not refer only to the question of *which* are the Anaxagorean elements but rather to *how* they are blended. Indeed, here the similarity between the parts does not refer at all to their qualitative nature, but rather to the identical composition that belongs to all parties and the whole. With this *caveat*, let us see the fragments of Anaxagoras. Aristotle’s words, far from being a misrepresentation of Anaxagorean doctrine, reveal themselves as the conclusion of the syllogism whose two premises would be these statements of Anaxagoras: «In everything there are parts of everything» (ἐν παντὶ παντὸς μοῖρα ἔνεστι: 59 B 11 DK) and «These things being so, one should believe that in the whole there are all things» (τούτων δὲ οὕτως ἔχόντων ἐν τῷ σύμπαντι χρὴ δοκεῖν ἐνεῖναι πάντα χροήματα: 59 B 4b). If in everything there are all the other things and in the whole there are all things, it follows that every thing will be in the same state as the whole. Everything will consist of the same components, which are the components of the whole.

To identify the parts, we should investigate then, which “whole” we mean in every case. As ingredient of the mixture, each “thing” (ingredient) is, so to speak, a “whole,” since Anaxagoras speaks of “parts of things” (59 B 6, 11, 12). However, he is rather little worry about the nature of each of these ingredients taken separately. He would rather be concerned about the “whole” (σύμπας) that they form in the initial but

<sup>3</sup> See *Phys.* A 4.187a25; *De cael.* Γ 302a28-b5; 4.302b11-26; *De gen. et corr.* A 1.314a24-b1; *De gen. anim.* A 18.723a6-7; *Metaph.* A 3.984a11-16; 7.988a28.



insoluble mixture<sup>4</sup>. Every thing is a mixture of all things, so that when compared to any other one and to the whole, the situation is always the same: the ingredients of the part and the whole are the same. This and nothing else could one wanted to express by saying that, according to Anaxagoras, the physical world is composed of homoiomerous parts, i.e. its fractions seem to be subject to the mixture of all things<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> P. LEON, *The Homoiomerics of Anaxagoras*, «The Classical Quarterly», xxi (1927) p. 138: «If we wish to understand the ‘homoiomereity’ of Anaxagoras we must take not a whole, a substance, or a quality, but *the whole*».

<sup>5</sup> It is even possible that the term was already used before Aristotle to explain Anaxagoras’ mixture. A.L. PECK, *Anaxagoras and the Parts*, «The Classical Quarterly», xx (1926) p. 65: «The ὁμοιομερῆ of Anaxagoras were things of which all the Parts were similar to all the Parts of everything [...] we must explain the word ὁμοιομερῆς by the statement of Anaxagoras himself that there is a portion of everything in everything», and he adds in the corresponding note: «It is not necessary to suppose that Anaxagoras used this term, but only that *it was already in use before Aristotle*» (my cursive). M. DRAGONA-MONACHOU, *Τὸ πρόβλημα τῶν ὁμοιομερειῶν τοῦ Ἀναξαγόρα, «Φιλοσοφία»*, vii (1977) p. 225 thinks that the term could be conceived by Archelaus. Although the majority of scholars have another interpretations of homoiomerity (principally thinking that there is a matter of homogeneity), I could find another ones close to mine. D.J. FURLEY, *Anaxagoras in Response to Parmenides*, «Canadian Journal of Philosophy», Suppl. II (1976) p. 71: «Everything is a mixture with the same ingredients; so everything is homoiomerous in a trivial sense». J. MANSFELD, *Die Vorsokratiker*, II, Stuttgart 1986, p. 167: «Zwar ist nach Aristoteles’ Anaxagoras-Interpretation jeder ‚Teil‘, sei es eines Lebewesens oder des Weltganzen, genauso eine Mischung, wie es das Lebewesen oder Weltganze selbst ist [...]. Nur die Tatsache der bloßen Vermischung aller möglichen Bestandteile ist im einen wie im anderen Fall vorhanden». A.-L. THERME, *Les principes du devenir cosmique chez Empédocle d’Agrigente et Anaxagore de Clazomène à partir de leur critique aristotélicienne*, Phil. Diss., Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2008, p. 56f: «Or une telle mixture de substances homéomères [...], sera nécessairement tout entière homéomère, et ce quel que soit le nombre de substances différentes qui la composent [...]: n’importe quelle partie du mélange final sera identique au tout». O’Brien provides us with further confirmation of our opinion, by understanding the words of Empedocles αὐτὰ ἔστιν ταῦτα (31 B 17, 34; 21, 13; 26, 3 DK) as an opposition to Anaxagoras; according to his interpretation, in Anaxagoras’ world things are characterized by heterogeneity, not by homogeneity: see D. O’BRIEN, “*Themselves alone*”: *Empedocles’ Description of the Elements*, in L. PALUMBO (a cura di), *Λόγον διδόναι. La filosofia come esercizio del render ragione. Studi in onore di G. Casertano*, Napoli 2011, pp. 221-31. As I stated elsewhere, «...paradójicamente, las cosas fenoménicas serían homéómeras, no por ser homogéneas sino por ser desemejantes a sí mismas» (D. TORRIJOS-CASTRILLEJO, *Anaxágoras y su recepción en Aristóteles*, Roma 2014, p. 47).

This idea is not only the result of an isolate text of Aristotle. We could see it in other ancient fonts who have similarly understood the homoiomerity in Anaxagoras. First, the text from which the title of this paper is taken comes from Lucretius, who speaks of one “homoiomereia” in singular, and he uses it not to refer to each of the ingredients but to *all things*: «What he [Anaxagoras] calls “homoiomereia of things” (*rerum homoeomerian*) means that the bones can be generated from small and tiny bones, entrails from small and tiny entrails...» (*De rer. nat.* 1 834-839). The single “homoiomereia” is so named because its composition of all things. Such configuration is worldwide. The referred parties are *not* extensive ones but ingredients of the mixture and the similarity between them therefore lies in the mode of their composition.

This perspective can be seen even more clearly in Aristotle’s commentator John Philoponus. In a little-known passage, the author uses the term ὁμοιομέρεια to refer not to the ingredients of the mixture nor to each observable thing but to the whole: «Anaxagoras said that, as in the whole, all things are mixed according to the principles. He also said that the whole was as a great homoiomereia that has all the things in itself (οἶον μίαν ὁμοιομέρειαν μεγάλην ἔχουσαν πάντα ἐν ἑαυτῇ) and the same happens in each of those things which are composed of parts»<sup>6</sup>. The whole therefore deserves homoiomereia’s name due to its composition mode. Anywhere it consists of identical constitutive parts (ingredients). Then, the whole can be divided into extensive parts (substances), which have the same constitution as it and consequently have the same name: «Here [Aristotle] speaks about a homoiomereia infinite in size, in which there are all entities and so [Anaxagoras] said that “all things were together”. It separates into partial homoiomereias (μερικῶς ὁμοιομερείας), which are not isolated, but also they have all things, but their appearance is named for the predominant in them»<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the name of ὁμοιομέρεια

Similarly, C. LOUGUET, *Anaxagore: Analogie, proportion, identité*, «Philosophie antique», XIII (2013) p. 142 speaks about the «hétérogénéité absolue (hétérogénéité à soi)» of the mixture.

<sup>6</sup> *In Phys.* CAG 396, 22-25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 397, 19-22.

is used to refer neither to the ingredients nor to the homogeneity of them or of the resulting things, but to a type of physical composition. According to Philoponus, a body is a homoimereia when all parts of its physical extent are composed of the same ingredients, which are also the same that constitute the whole.

It is therefore reasonable to think that the term did not introduce a strange doctrine in the philosophy of Anaxagoras, but expressed his theory of universal mixture. The “similar parts” are the same “things” (χρήματα) that include in itself parts of every one. In relation to that whole, which is the cosmos, the “things” are always a constitutive part (an “ingredient”) and sometimes – when predominant – they are also extensive (a “substance”). Such is the ambiguity of the term χρήματα in Anaxagoras<sup>8</sup>, who can make us believe that speaking about “homoimereity” could be paradoxical, but this term is just intended to explain the truly paradox: that everything, the whole and its parts, is made in the same way, and that is to say, its components are all things. This is also the most important “similarity” that each part has to another one and to the whole, i.e. to be composed of *the same* ingredients<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> P. CURD, *The Legacy of Parmenides*, Princeton 1998, p. 139: «Anaxagoras uses ‘thing’ (*chrēma*) indiscriminately between things at the metaphysically basic level (‘things that are’) and things at the level of apparent coming-to-be and passing-away (‘no thing comes to be or perishes’)».

<sup>9</sup> D. SIDER, *The Fragments of Anaxagoras*, Sankt Augustin 2005, p. 139: «In early Greek, [ὁμοιοσ] means ‘the same as’ (not merely ‘similar to’ ...).».