Book Reviews

An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy: The Chief Fragments and Ancient Testimony, with Connecting Commentary. By John Mansley Robinson. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968. Pp. x+342. $4.25. Paper.)

This is a book that fills a long-standing need and does it well. In the past, the teacher of a survey course in the history of ancient philosophy who wished to cover the pre-Socratics more fully than is done in one of the several anthologies of Greek philosophy had awkward options. The most up-to-date and authoritative of the textbooks, G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven's *The Presocratic Philosophers*, is too forbidding for a course at the sophomore-junior level. John Burnet's classic, *Early Greek Philosophy*, still unsurpassed in the quality of translation, puts one-sided emphasis on the scientific character of early Greek philosophy. Besides, neither Kirk-Raven nor Burnet cover the Sophists (Burnet not even Democritus). Kathleen Freeman's *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (a translation of the *B* sections in Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*) has the virtue that it gives the student a forceful and graphic impression of the scantiness of actual fragments; but the student is likely to feel more bewildered than challenged. As for the anthologies devoted specifically to the pre-Socratics, Milton C. Nahm's *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy* is badly dated, and Philip Wheelwright's *The Presocratics* takes excessive liberties with translation.

Robinson's book now affords an excellent choice. The selection of primary source materials for the whole sequence from Ionians to Sophists is adequate to generous. Beyond this, Robinson has included about fifty passages—from Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, the historians, the tragic poets, Aristophanes, and the Hippocratic writings—that are interesting for their philosophic content or as suggestive parallels. Robinson's translations of the fragments are, on the whole, precise and sensitive (I mention below some lapses that I have noticed). His introductory and connecting comments are lucid, well-informed, and discreet.

The book starts with a twenty-page chapter on Hesiod in which equal attention is given to the *Theogony* and to *Works and Days*. Robinson does not let go of the moral-anthropological strain when he turns to the early philosophers. In the case of the atomists he devotes full chapters to "Macrocosm" and "Microcosm," respectively. He concludes with fifty pages, under the section heading "The Unseating of Zeus," on the three-sided confrontation of Sophistic, traditional, and Socratic values in the late fifth century. The choice of texts and the explanations offered in this section bring out forcefully the truth of Robinson's epitomizing observation: "Plato saw further. He saw that in an important sense the teaching of the sophists was merely an expression of conventional morality itself. . . . In the teaching of the sophist the prudential morality of Hesiod has come home to roost" (p. 275). Cosmology and epistemology are, of course, the major themes of the book; but the chapters on Hesiod, Democritean ethics, and the Sophists could also be read profitably in courses in Greek ethics, classical civilization, or as background in a course on Plato.

The usefulness of the book as a textbook is enhanced by a substantial, yet wisely selective, "Bibliographical Essay," a "Note on the Sources," an index, maps, and

illustrative figures and diagrams. The editing and design are very good. All ancient texts are printed as prose extracts, and the fragments are given additional prominence by being printed in boldface. References have been assembled at the end of the book, but Robinson has consistently shown good judgment in mentioning the source in his text in cases where this information would be specially relevant. An aid the book unfortunately does not have (it would be wise to supply this in future editions) is a concordance of Robinson's numbering of the fragments against the more familiar numbering of Diels-Kranz. The teacher (or the student who finds a reference in another book) must now thumb through the book or check through a whole reference section to spot a fragment or testimonium he knows by its *B* or *A* number in Diels-Kranz.

I have two more critical comments on points that affect the pedagogic value of the book. Parmenides B8 (the deduction of the "signposts" of "what-is") is the best preserved sustained argument from this period. It would be wise to leave this precious continuity of 61 lines undisturbed. Robinson interrupts the text to introduce comments and even imposes his own scheme of organization, viz. the sequence: B8.34-36, followed by B6-7, B8.1-24, B8.25 omitted (presumably an oversight), B4, B8.26-33, B8.42-49, B8.36-41, B5, B8.50-61. In the chapter on the Pythagoreans, which is on the whole both judicious in selection of materials and clear in its interpretive comments, I find two faults: The diagram on the monochord experiment is poorly drawn (the proportions for the fifth and fourth are noticeably off from the correct 3 : 2 and 4 : 3) and the explanation of "justice as a proportion" is too condensed to render the idea intelligible —let alone plausible.

It would be an injustice to evaluate this book only as an undergraduate textbook. The scholarship that has gone into its preparation invites and deserves criticism on substantive issues of interpretation. Robinson's connecting commentary is never captious or subjective, but here are some points on which the presentation seems unconvincing, incomplete, or misleading. In the case of Anaximander he rejects the Aristotelian tradition of a geometrical explanation of the earth's position in favor of a tradition that assigns to Anaximander a cosmic vortex. Robinson's main complaint against the geometrical interpretation is that "it does away at a single stroke with the notion of an absolute up and down, and it would be remarkable if Anaximander had put it forward at the very beginning of Greek philosophy" (p. 30). But as Kahn and others have argued, the geometrical explanation is quite in order, given Anaximander's emphasis, variously shown, on equality and symmetry. Besides, the ancient reports of an Anaximandrian vortex have for the historian of philosophy a status equivalent to the philologist's *lectio facilior*: After Aristotle (indeed after Aristophanes) "vortex" became the thing to say about all early cosmologists. It is important to remember, furthermore, that Heraclitus, a generation later, does seem to challenge the "notion of an absolute up and down" when he says "The way up and the way down are the same" (B60).

In connection with Anaximenes, Robinson first concedes that there is not "any mention of the vortex motion" in the testimonia, but adds that "if we look more closely at the evidence we see that its presence is implied." The evidence he probes assigns to Anaximenes the theory that heavenly bodies ride upon air "owing to their flatness" and "like a leaf" (p. 44). Where, even implicitly, is there a vortex here? A leaf can ride upon air even when the air is still. In fact, "to be borne aloft" and "to be whirled about," two terms that Robinson uses in apposition to one another in his comment, represent distinct, even antithetical, states. (The broader the leaf the greater the support from the air, Anaximenes must have reasoned. A huge leaf, the earth, would remain aloft indefinitely long.)

It would have been incongruous for the early Ionians to ascribe the cause of motion to a mechanical process. Anaximander's ἄπειρον was divine, and Anaximenes' air soul-like. Both of these principles must have been thought as self-moving. The terms "rarefaction-condensation" (cf. χαλαρόν and μάνωσις vs. πύκνωσις) mistranslate the cosmic processes in Anaximenes; for they are too passive, too mechanical. The appropriate connotation is, no doubt, biological: "dilation-contraction." Robinson's "dilation-compression" is linguistically half-right, but he leaves no doubt in his explanatory remarks that he understands the process as mechanical.

Even with the biological connotation of "dilation-compression" born in mind, the conception is inapt in the context of Heraclitus, and Robinson errs in suggesting (p. 89) that the "flux" is essentially such a process. (Heraclitus' own conception is that of an "exchange.") A fault of omission in this chapter is the absence of a section on the quality of Heraclitean language (puns, verbal echoes, ambiguity, etymologies). Most of the poetic-rhetorical effects in Heraclitus cannot, of course, be captured in translation, and that is all the more reason why they deserve discussion.

Robinson presents the relation between the central thinkers of the period, Heraclitus and Parmenides, and the earlier pre-Socratics somewhat misleadingly. He assumes that "the problem of 'the one and the many' grew out of the Ionian tradition" (p. 87). And so, to the question "Is reality one or many?" Heraclitus answered that it is "both one and many"; Parmenides that "if what is is one, it cannot also be a many" (p. 107). This, as is well-known, is Plato's way of structuring the history of early Greek philosophy. The record suggests, rather, that the question "one or many?" far from being implicit in Ionian cosmology (the question at that stage was "*what* is it?") or presupposed by Heraclitus, begins to be relevant only in the course of the Parmenidean elenchus that marks the "signposts" and "bounds" of what-is (also as a result of that elenchus).

The phrase τὸ μέγεθος ἄπειρον, "infinite in magnitude," in Melissus is interpreted by Robinson as referring not to size or expanse but to "power." He defends this on three grounds. (a) If Melissus meant to assert spatial infinity he would have given a proof. (b) Simplicius insists that Melissus was not thinking in terms of size. (c) In B9 Melissus says that the one cannot have a body. For the sense of "infinite power" Robinson refers us to B8(6) "nothing is stronger than true being." Now aside from the fact that this does not say that being is *infinitely* strong, the context of the utterance makes it clear that strength is not some vaguely conceived "power" but cohesiveness and rigidity. The answer to (a) is that Melissus *thought* he had given a proof (he treats infinity in μέγεθος as a corollary of temporal infinity). Besides, it is only if what-is is infinite in some sense implying expanse or spread that Melissus' proof of uniqueness ("if it were two, they . . . would be limited by one another") can have some plausibility. To (b) the answer is that Simplicius invariably interprets "the one" of the pre-Socratics (even that of Empedocles!) as incorporeal. The answer to (c) is that space itself has no body.

Robinson has refrained from raising the question of the cosmic cycle in his discussion of Empedocles. This is perhaps sound strategy for an introductory book, since the evidence is largely philological. But my impression from teaching is that students *are* interested in this question, for it does bear significantly on our understanding of the cosmological function of Love and Hate. (Beyond this, the current issue in astronomy between "steady state" and "oscillating" models of the universe affords an intriguing parallel.) An appendix could have been devoted to this question—the central and most absorbing question of Empedoclean scholarship at this moment.

I might add that, of an account of Greek philosophy that starts with Hesiod, it seems niggardly that it should have relegated Thales to an appendix. True, most of

what the ancients tell us about Thales has the coloring of legend. But the thinking of Heraclitus and Parmenides presupposes a vigorous debate on questions of φύσις, real or ultimate constitution. It is incredible that Anaximenes should have been the only man before Heraclitus to raise this question. (The ontology of Anaximander stays close to the naive—or naive realist—conception of contrary quality-things; it does not require the concept of φύσις.) It is more credible that the man whose name was later associated with the doctrine that all things are water should have played a role in that debate.

I have noticed the following infelicities of translation that have actual or potential bearing on interpretation. The phrase κατὰ τὸ χρεών in Anaximander B1 should not be translated "as it must be" but "as is right" or "in accordance with *right* necessity" (italics here and below are mine). The same holds for Heraclitus B80, and generally for words of the χρή-family throughout this period. (The concept is not one of compulsion but of necessity in the sense of norm, fitness, or propriety.) In translating Parmenides B1.32 Robinson misses the past tense of χρῆν (either historical past or past of unreality) and translates "seeing that appearances *have* to be acceptable." Quite apart from this, I do not see how he gets the sense of "seeing that appearances" from ὡς τὰ δοκοῦντα. At B6.9 Robinson's rendering, "and *that* the road of all things is a backward-turning one," would be right if the text were πάντων δὲ παλίντροπον εἶναι κέλευθον (the text reads . . . πόσ ἐστι κέλευθος). At B8.43 and 8.49 he translates πάντοθεν as "on every side" (instead of "*from* every side"), and in the second half of 8.49 he changes the text from ὁμῶς, "equally," to ὅμως, "nevertheless," and adopts Kranz's tortuous translation "it meets with its limits." For Melissus B7(7) Robinson translates "For there to be any emptiness, what is would have to retire into the void," whereas the sense is "If there were void, then it might [or 'could'] retreat into the void" (εἰ μὲν γὰρ κενεὸν ἦν ὑπεχώρει ἂν εἰς τὸ κενόν).

I have spotted only two misprints that are worth mentioning. On p. 176, in the text from Lucretius and in the section title, the term *homoiomeria* (better *homoeomeria*, as in the Latin source) is spelled *homoiomerai*. (Or is there some of the old confusion behind this slip, between τὰ ὁμοιομερῆ and ἡ ὁμοιομέρεια? On p. 314 (2.18) Diels's proposed reading γυρόν is printed γυρών.

For a paperback of this size, the price of $4.25 seems unreasonably inflated—all the more so in view of the possibilities of extensive adoption as a college textbook.

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