

## Preface to the Revised Edition

*The Presocratic Philosophers* was conceived and written as a continuous whole: it was the weight and bulk of the typescript, not any lacuna in the narrative, which persuaded the publishers that a division into two volumes would make the work more wieldy. For this revised edition the original form has been reimposed on the obese matter, and the chapters run consecutively from I to XXV. The two Bibliographies of the first edition have been united; a single set of Indexes serves the text.

The Indexes have been redone from scratch. The Bibliography has been slightly expanded. The text itself is fundamentally unchanged: I have corrected a number of typographical mistakes (the proof-reading of the first edition was lamentably sloppy), and I have eliminated one or two startling errors of fact; but I have not attempted to check all the references for accuracy, or to emend the various infelicities of style and substance which friends and reviewers have brought to my attention. The following pages, which the publishers have kindly allowed me, set down a few unsystematic reflections and recantations.

First, let me make four general remarks about the scope and mode of the book. *The Presocratic Philosophers* was never intended to supply a comprehensive account of early Greek thought: there are many aspects of the intellectual lives of the Presocratics which it does not mention, let alone discuss; and the *dramatis personae* of the work were, as I confessed, determined by a convention—lightly introduced and now immovably entrenched—which may give a misleading notion of the philosophical and scientific riches which Plato and his contemporaries inherited at the beginning of the fourth century BC. My aim, then, was modest: I proposed to analyse some of the arguments of some of the early Greek thinkers; and in doing so I hoped to celebrate the characteristic rationality of Greek thought. Recent scholarship has gone out of its way to stress the irrational side of the Greek genius: that even the Greeks had their moments of unreason is not to be denied; but that sad platitude, however engrossing its detailed documentation may be, is surely of far less significance than the happy truth which it balances. For rationality, in a relaxed sense of that term, was the glory and triumph of the Greek mind, and its most valuable gift to posterity. The Greeks stand to the irrational as the French to bad cuisine.

Nor was the book intended to be a scholarly history. Some critics, indeed, have accused me of being anti-historical, and their accusation has some point: I made one or two naughty remarks about history, and I occasionally flirted with anachronistic interpretations of Presocratic views. For all that, the book is a sort of history: it recounts past thoughts, and its heroes are long dead. In speaking slightly of history I had two specific things in mind—studies of the ‘background’ (economic, social, political) against which the Presocratics wrote, and studies of the network of ‘influences’ within which they carried on their researches. For I doubt the pertinence of such background to our understanding of early Greek thought: a few general facts are helpful and a few detailed facts are entertaining; but the chronicles of Elea or the narrative of Melissus’ naval

exploits do not aid our interpretation of Eleatic metaphysics, and the politics of South Italy have little relevance to Pythagorean philosophizing. I am sceptical, too, of claims to detect intellectual influences among the Presocratics. The little tufts of evidence which bear upon the chronology of those early publications are, as I observed in more than one connection, too few and too scanty to be woven into the sort of elegant tapestry which we customarily embroider in writing the histories of modern philosophy. Much of the historical detail with which scholarship likes to deck out its studies is either merely impertinent or grossly speculative.

My third remark concerns literature. Some of the Presocratics wrote poetry—or at any rate, they versified their thoughts; others were prose stylists. My analysis of the arguments of those thinkers ignored the literary form in which they wrote—indeed, I inclined to dismiss Heraclitus' prosings as so much flummery, and to regard Parmenides' clod-hopping hexameters as evincing a lamentable error of judgment. (Metaphysicians, as I think Carnap said, are musicians without musical ability.) I am not wholly repentant; for I remain to be convinced that art and thought—even in the case of Heraclitus—are inextricably intertwined. But I have certainly shown myself insensitive to some of the finer nuances of certain pieces of Presocratic exposition, and were I writing the book anew I should take a less nonchalant attitude to questions of style and form.

Finally, formalism. I made strenuous efforts to formalize many Presocratic arguments; and not infrequently the devices of modern logic were employed to symbolize their premisses and conclusions. Some readers find, as I myself do, that a judicious use of symbolism can illuminate the structure of an argument; but others are perplexed by the technicality or disgusted by the vulgarity of symbolical transcription, and I was perhaps foolish to provoke their displeasure. However that may be, I made a major blunder in failing to distinguish sharply between formalization and symbolization. By symbolization I mean the replacement of the signs of a natural language (i.e. of Greek or English words) by the symbols of an artificial language. Symbolization produces brevity (for the formulae of logic are as a rule shorter than their natural counterparts), and it has the advantage of rigour (for logical symbols are precisely defined); on the other hand, symbolization can be tedious (for more reasons than one) and it may give a wholly spurious impression of scientific exactitude. But whatever its merits and demerits, symbolization is perfectly dispensable so far as the interpretation of the Presocratics is concerned. Formalization is another matter. Most philosophers set out their arguments informally: formalization consists, first, in distinguishing the different components of an argument—premisses, intermediate steps, conclusions—, and secondly, in articulating the relevant internal structure of those components and exposing the logical features on which the inference depends. (The numbering and indenting of sentences are typographical devices for facilitating the first task; and the second task often requires a pedantic attention to detail and a certain artificiality of style—babu English has its uses.) Formalization does not require symbols: Sextus Empiricus, for example, usually sets out his arguments with an admirable formality; yet he never uses artificial symbols. And formalization, unlike symbolization, seems to me absolutely indispensable for the interpretation and assessment of informal arguments of any complexity: God, no doubt, can immediately perceive the form of an argument through the veil of informal discourse; mortals generally cannot. Most philosophers' arguments are bad arguments; and their

informal dress disguises their defects: formalization reveals those faults and flaws—and thereby indicates what, if anything, can be done to repair them.

I turn now to some points of detail.

On p. 57 I advert to the fact that certain Stoics and Christians interested themselves in the thought of Heraclitus. I should also have mentioned the Pyrrhonist Aenesidemus. The precise connection between Aenesidemus and the philosophy of Heraclitus is puzzling and contentious (see, most recently, U. Burkhard, *Die angebliche Heraklit-Nachfolge des skeptikers Aenesidem* (Bonn, 1973)); but it is plain that Aenesidemus devoted some time to the study of Heraclitus. Some of our later sources—notably Sextus—depend upon Aenesidemus, and they no doubt reproduce any distortions which he may have inflicted on Heraclitus' thought.

P. 138: Note that Xenophanes also appears in the Pyrrhonist pedigree at DL, IX.71–3—and earlier in the pedigree claimed by the Sceptical Academy: see Cicero, *Lucullus* v 14. Heraclitus too (see p. 144) figures in both the Academic and the Pyrrhonian line (Plutarch, *adv Col* 1122A; DL, IX.71–3). But it should be said that a glance at some of the other names in those lists—Homer, Archilochus, Euripides—shows that they cannot be taken as sober historical documents.

On p. 145 (cf. p. 297, p. 609 n. 16) I interpret Heraclitus **136= B 101=15 M** as saying: 'I searched by myself', 'I was an independent inquirer, an autodidact.' That seemed to be how Diogenes' source understood the phrase *edizêsamên emeôuton* ('he studied under no one but searched, as he says, for himself, and he learned everything from himself': IX.5—the text is uncertain but the sense is clear); several ancient authorities, presumably relying on 136, assert that Heraclitus was self-taught; and a majority of modern scholars have read 136 in this way (see Marcovich [129], 57–8). But that is surely quite mistaken: *edizêsamên emeôuton* cannot mean 'I searched by myself', but only 'I searched for myself', 'I inquired into myself'—Heraclitus is confessing to bouts of introspection, not boasting of periods of solitary study. None of the passages which Marcovich cites as parallel to the former interpretation is comparable; and I find no text in which *dizêmai*+accusative means anything other than 'inquire into'. There is good circumstantial evidence for believing that Heraclitus was, intellectually speaking, a lone wolf—or at least, that he claimed to be; and there is no need to see the influence of 136 behind the ancient reports of his sturdy independence of mind. As for Diogenes' source, he probably got matters right; for the train of thought at DL, IX.5 is this: 'Heraclitus did not adopt views from any teacher; his preferred method of study was introspection, so that all his views came from himself.'

On p. 172 I implicitly ascribe to John Locke the splendid portmanteau word 'alchimerical'; and it is in fact found in the Everyman edition of Locke's *Essay* in the heading to IV v 7. But according to Nidditch's critical edition of the work, Locke wrote 'all...chimerical' (there are no variant readings), and I suppose that 'alchimerical' is an invention of the Everyman editor or printer.

On p. 173, and again on pp. 182 and 471, I quote Gorgias' *Concerning What is Not* from the version preserved by Sextus. It is true, as I say on p. 173, that the rival text in the pseudo-Aristotelian *MXG* is 'wretchedly corrupt', so that, in a sense, Sextus' presentation of the argument is superior. But it now seems patently obvious to me that Sextus is not quoting—or pretending to quote—Gorgias' very words: the structure of the arguments, the syntax, and the vocabulary are all thoroughly Sextan. Sextus may preserve

the gist of Gorgias' argument (the matter requires further detailed investigation); but he certainly does not reproduce Gorgias 'little treatise—and I do not now understand how I (or anyone else) can have thought that he does.

P. 181: Melissus' metaphysics starts from the proposition which I labelled (A): '*O* exists.' I treated the proposition as an axiom—whence the label—and I suggested, on the basis of a passage in the *MXG*, that Melissus did not try to argue for it (p. 184, p. 613 n. 12). But the *MXG* gives only the weakest support to the suggestion, and I now incline to take more seriously the remarks of Simplicius at *in Phys* 103.15–6: Melissus 'begins his treatise thus: "If it is nothing, what can be said about it as being something?..."'. The long Melissan passage at *in Phys* 103.15–104.15 is certainly paraphrase rather than quotation; but much of the paraphrase can be tested against Melissus' own surviving words, and by that test it proves remarkably accurate. Thus it is permissible to infer that 103.15–6 represents, directly or indirectly, something genuinely Melissan; and in that case we should think that (A) is not an unargued axiom—rather, Melissus offered some sort of argument in favour of the proposition that *O* exists. (See further paragraph 3 of my 'Reply to Professor Mourelatos' in *Philosophical Books* 22, 1981, 78–9.)

On p. 253 I suggest that *metaxu tôn ontôn* in Zeno's *logos* of 'finite and infinite' may mean not 'between (any two) existents' but rather 'in the middle of (each of) the existents'. The suggestion makes excellent philosophical sense, but I now fear that it may be linguistically impossible; at any rate, I have not been able to find any occurrence of *metaxu*+genitive with the sense of 'in the middle of'.

On p. 259 I associate Zeno's paradox of the millet seed with the Sorites puzzle later advanced by Eubulides. The association is, in fact, a commonplace of soritical scholarship; but it is also erroneous—for the millet seed and the Sorites, as Aristotle's ancient commentators knew, are distinct arguments and significantly different in logical form. (I owe this point to David Sedley; see now my 'Medicine, Experience, Logic', in *Science and Speculation*, ed. J. Barnes, J. Brunschwig, M.F. Burnyeat, and M. Schofield (Cambridge, 1982).) Hence I withdraw what I say about the Sorites on p. 259 and stress the last sentence of p. 260.

On p. 294 I unaccountably forgot to mention the Pythagorean Hiketas: the hint on p. 28 that he may have been one of the first and few ancient thinkers to have grasped the moral of Zeno's Stadium should have been repeated in more glowing form on p. 294.

P. 322: The definitions of homoiomereity in effect turn '...is homoiomerous' into a predicate of *properties*; in fact, as the rest of the discussion makes plain, it is *things*—in particular, *stuffs*—to which the predicate is appropriately applied. Definitions (D1) and (D2) should be emended to avoid the mistake; fortunately, the error is self-contained, since those definitions have no important role in my interpretation of Anaxagoras' theory of stuffs.

My discussion of Philolaus in Chapter XVIII now strikes me as highly unsatisfactory, mainly for philological reasons. First of all, Carl Huffmann has persuaded me that I have most probably misread or misinterpreted the texts of Philolaus in certain important places (e.g. the orthodox supplement to sentence [vi] of **279=B 2**, which I accepted without question, may well be wrong; the participle *gnôsoumenon*, in **278=B 3**, which I construe with most scholars as passive, is most probably active). And in general, the interpretation of the fragments which Huffmann is in the process of producing seems to me superior to my own in many ways. But secondly, I am no longer convinced that the fragments I

relied upon are genuine. I claimed to be following Burkert's masterly exposition; but in fact, as Beth Crabb pointed out to me, I reject the argument which Burkert regards as the strongest reason in favour of authenticity; for I do not believe, as Burkert does, that Aristotle's account of fifth-century Pythagoreanism is based upon Philolaus' work. More importantly, as I read the fragments again, I am more impressed than before by their similarities, in style and content, to the many Pythagorean forgeries which are collected in Thesleff [175]. At all events, until Burkert's work is supplemented by a thorough philological investigation of the language of the fragments, I shall remain sceptical—though reluctantly so—of their authenticity.

P. 451: Sextus ascribes the *Sisyphus* fragment to Critias; other sources attribute it (or rather, certain lines from it) to Euripides. Dihle [456 A] has recently argued for Euripidean authorship, and the case for Critias has been restated by Sutton [456 B]. I should have remarked that at lines 19–20 I read *phronôn te kai/prosechôn ta panta*, at 25 *theois enesti*, at 30 *ponêseis* (with the MSS), and at 40 *phobois*. In line 13, '[of the gods]' should be marked as a supplement.

Two small but pervasive points of style may be mentioned. First, the use of 'second', 'third', etc. as adverbs is a foible of the publishers not of the author. Secondly, the slapdash use of inverted commas to distinguish use from mention is due to the author not to the publishers. (I was once taught to believe that a phrase such as 'the term *logos*' was both misleading and incorrect, and that I should write 'the term "*logos*".' In fact, 'the term *logos*' is perfectly correct (autonymy is a normal feature of English), and it will mislead no sane reader.)

Finally, several readers have justly complained that my discussion of Melissus' metaphysics is very hard to follow: it is difficult to remember, thirty pages on, what theorem (T6) of Melissan metaphysics was; and the exposition cannot be understood without exasperatingly frequent back references. I hope that the bookmark inserted in the present edition may remove that difficulty—and also the similar but minor difficulty in the case of Xenophanes' theology.

In preparing this revision I have incurred some new debts. Timothy Barnes kindly corrected a number of errors of fact in one of the Appendixes; Charles Kahn allowed me to see a draft of his long review of my book for the *Journal of Philosophy*; Alex Mourelatos generously permitted me to scan and to profit from the many *marginalia* in his copy of the first edition; Carl Huffmann and Beth Crabb spent some time in persuading me that I had got Philolaus all wrong; Larry Schrenk and Beth Crabb, despite heavy commitments, jointly undertook the unrewarding task of preparing new Indexes to the book.

The first edition of this book was begun and ended in one of the most pleasant parts of the Old World: it was my good fortune to be able to produce the second edition in one of the most pleasant parts of the New.

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