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THE PRESOCRATICS. . (G.) Stamatellos
Introduction to Presocratics. A Thematic Approach to Early Greek Philosophy with Key Readings. Pp. xiv + 162, map. Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley–Blackwell, 2012. Paper, £19.99, €24, US\\$84.95 (Cased, £50, €60, US\\$29.95). ISBN: 978-0-470-65503-0 (978-0-470-65502-3 hbk).

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that recognises and defends the failure of the paradigm in other works as well – often in subtle ways (p. 23) – though there are major exceptions to this (p. 28). There are echoes here of how Higgins read Xenophon (*Xenophon the Athenian* [1977]), a tradition which also influences Tamiolaki's paper on the image of the imperfect leader. The claim is that we should read Xenophon for the same unspoken implications as in a tragic text (p. 33); but the rhetorical nature of many of Xenophon's texts, with prefaces stating their intention to praise, makes them very different from tragedy. And though the introduction makes an issue of my views, its promotion of open readings of specific passages does not take account of my discussions of them, such as why the 'palinodes' to *Cyropaedia* and the *Spartan Constitution* should be read as rhetorical strategies designed to reinforce the praise in the body of the text rather than to question it (Gray, *Mirror*, Chapter 8), or how the trial of Sphodrias is one of a group of patterned trial narratives within Xenophon's works, which prevent us from reading it as condemnation of Agesilaus' part in it (Gray, *Mirror*, Chapter 4). Still, the volume overall gives a good impression of how Xenophon is read these days, adding to the growing stock of recent publications on Xenophon mentioned above. It could have been shorter, though, without real loss of substance: I counted 166 footnotes in one paper.

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THE PRESOCRATICS

STAMATELLOS (G.) *Introduction to Presocratics. A Thematic Approach to Early Greek Philosophy with Key Readings*. Pp. xiv + 162, map. Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley–Blackwell, 2012. Paper, £19.99, €24, US\$84.95 (Cased, £50, €60, US\$29.95). ISBN: 978-0-470-65503-0 (978-0-470-65502-3 hbk).

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Why did philosophy originate in Greece? What does the term *philosophia* mean and who coined it? What defines *kosmos* as opposed to *chaos*? This practical volume contains a succinct and intelligently organised propaedeutic to the compelling inquiries of the Presocratic thinkers. S.'s theme-based approach to early Greek philosophy is targeted at non-experienced readers; it is a very good introductory guide for the general public and an invaluable resource for philosophy lecturers struggling to enthuse their undergraduate students.

Nothing in this volume is taken for granted, a factor which becomes immediately apparent upon a quick glance at the opening sections. After the preface there is a chronological table connecting each thinker to his birthplace, followed by a reference guide to the fragments in which the DK numbering system is explained. A map of the Eastern Mediterranean in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. provides a useful visual aid at the start of the book. Further helpful tools can be found at the end of the volume: Appendix A contains Wright's translation of the main fragments for immediate reference, whereas Appendix B and C focus on the sources and the reception of the Presocratics respectively. Two glossaries, one of Greek terms, the other of philosophical terms, are also included. Throughout, philosophical terminology is extrapolated from the text and explained within squared boxes in the margin.

The main body of the book comprises a series of short essays on what S. considers six significant themes in Presocratic investigations, namely: 'Principles', 'Cosmos', 'Being', 'Soul', 'Knowledge' and 'Ethics'. These six chapters are preceded by a general introduction about the role and importance of the pioneering Presocratic philosophy and historiography and a brief account of what is known about the life and work of individual thinkers. In this account readers will also find the philosophers grouped under the traditional divisions of *Ionians*, *Pythagoreans*, *Eleatics* and *Pluralists* and will be instructed on the distinctiveness of each individual enterprise as well as on the rationale behind these categories. In what is the first genuinely thematic essay of the book, S. illustrates the primary principles of the universe and the nature of being postulated by the Presocratics. The content of this chapter is itself thematically arranged so that, for instance, S. assesses material explanations separately from formal principles and attention is given to the shifting focus from *One* to *Many*. Here, basic concepts such as *archê*, *chaos* and *physis* are introduced while other more technical vocabulary such as *isonomia* and *hylozoism* are explained. In Chapters 4 and 5 S. enters the cosmological and ontological dimension of Presocratic thought and tackles the vast overarching issues of temporality and eternity, being and not being, finitude and infinity. These complex topics are presented in accessible language and readers are guided step by step through the implication of each theory. Certainly, here more than anywhere else in the book, each subject leads smoothly into another and S. wonderfully accomplishes his aim to show not only 'how Presocratic thinking formed' but also 'how one Presocratic responded to another' (p. viii). The concept of the soul is the theme of the sixth chapter in which S. explains how the notion of *psychê* shifted its meaning from designating the Homeric shade descending to the underworld after death to signifying the source of life and intelligence. This chapter also includes a short discussion of the related topics of transmigration and immortality. Chapter 7 surveys the Presocratics' groundbreaking work on epistemology, which relies on the fundamental discrimination between true knowledge and opinion, and which advances poignant criticism against traditional religion. The limitations of human knowledge, the question of how to acquire wisdom and the opposition between reason and sense-perception are other central themes of the chapter. Finally, the theme-based bulk of the book ends with a chapter on ethics, in which the contribution of the Presocratics to the development of moral philosophy from the epic world of heroism to a more character-based ethical approach is explored. Here readers will get a taste of the fascinating movement leading from an ethics centred on the moral consequence of action to one more interested in the moral agent. In the last section of this chapter, S. presents the compelling case of Democritus' atomic ethics. A page-long conclusion offers a useful summary of the main points covered.

S.'s transversal approach has many merits. Surveying the Presocratic material theme-by-theme rather than thinker-by-thinker, S. succeeds in demonstrating that 'the early Greek accounts' already revealed 'the characteristics of argument and debate' (p. 80). His approach contains refreshing insight into this difficult subject of bold theories and innovative philosophical inquiry, and beginners will find it both clear and enticing. Of course, S.'s book also has its limitations. No mention is made of scholarly dispute and therefore inexperienced readers may be left with an impression that some questions are less thorny than they actually are. For instance, those well-read on the subject might find unsupported claims such as the following rather perplexing: 'Anaximander's *apeiron* is the eternal originative *material* mass' (p. 21, second emphasis mine), 'Sophocles' unknowable nature of the divine in *Oedipus the King* echoes Xenophanes' and Parmenides' doubts about mortal beliefs' (p. 119); others may turn their nose up at S.'s conflation of Heraclitus' and Cratylus' theories on p. 58. Moreover, a thematic approach

to the Presocratics will inevitably lead to repetitions and artificial divides. Indeed, one may find sentences such as ‘Presocratic thinkers did not all have the same philosophical views’ (p. 6) a redundant truism. I found myself questioning the benefits of treating the epistemological and ontological dimension in Parmenides’ doctrine separately. Hence, since it is perhaps the nature of an introduction to oversimplify, so far as students are concerned, some caution may be called for. Overall, however, this book’s merits far outnumber its flaws. Less ill-disposed critics will surely appreciate the many praiseworthy components of this enterprise: the sensitive way in which Presocratic thought is presented as bridging the worlds of epic and classical philosophy, the many subtle references to less known topics such as the paragraph on Pherecydes of Syros (p. 10) or the influence of the Presocratics on the playwrights and Islamic theosophical literature (pp. 119; 122).

Like the diver in the fresco from Paestum printed on the cover of the book, inexperienced readers are encouraged to deepen their knowledge of Presocratic philosophy, while Socrates’ alleged statement about Heraclitus’ book will teach them that ‘the reader needs to be an excellent diver, like those from Delos, to get to the bottom of it’ (p. 12). Experts in the field will perhaps find no new revelations but will none the less appreciate the elegance of its thematic treatment and may take pleasure in being reminded of what Karl Popper described as ‘the greatness of the early Greek philosophers, who gave Europe its philosophy, its science, and its humanism’ (preface to the *World of Parmenides*, cited in this volume p. 128).

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PHILOSOPHERS AND POETRY

HEATH (M.) *Ancient Philosophical Poetics*. Pp. viii + 195. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Paper, £18.99, US\$29.99 (Cased, £50, US\$80). ISBN: 978-0-521-16868-7 (978-0-521-19879-0 hbk).

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‘Key Themes in Ancient Philosophy provides concise books, written by major scholars and accessible to non-specialists, on important themes in ancient philosophy which remain of philosophical interest today’ (from the back cover). Happily, this is one of those cases where the description of the series (‘Key Themes’) says it all. After providing a brief outline, I will review the book according to the standards set by the publisher.

The brief introduction sets the scene by asking philosophically crucial questions such as ‘what is poetry?’ and why is it integral to (most) human societies. The first chapter, ‘Poetry: the Roots of a Problem’, sketches, for the benefit of the non-specialist, the parable of Muse-inspired poetry in archaic Greece and the first attempts (Xenophanes, Heraclitus, etc.) at criticising its far-reaching impact. The opposition between Muse-authorized (so the poets) and self-authorized production (as the critics of poetry expect from the poets) turns out to be a key interpretative tool, one that nicely accounts for the title *Philosophical Poetics*. The following chapters are devoted to Plato’s *Republic* (‘A Radical Solution’), Aristotle’s *Poetics* (‘The Natural History of Poetry’), later attempts to rescue poetry on the part of such diverse figures as Plutarch and his anti-Epicurean stance (‘Ways to Find Truth in Falsehood’), Maximus of Tyre, Plotinus and Longinus (‘The Marriage of Homer and Plato’).