

INTRODUCTION

Since the days of Cicero the history of philosophy has been influenced, to a large extent, by revivals of earlier Greek philosophies: the philosophy under the Roman Empire, of the Middle Ages, and of the Renaissance can be described as the history of Platonisms and Aristotelianisms and their respective Neo-Platonist and Christian transformations; and in the early modern period, the Hellenistic schools – Stoicism, Epicureanism as transmitted by Lucretius, and Scepticism – enjoyed a similar influence.

The afterlife of the *Presocratic* philosophers, however, seems to be much more limited: while it is true that in Plato and especially in Aristotle debate with predecessors plays a major role it is precisely the impact made by these two thinkers that has almost eclipsed the status of the Presocratics as independent authorities. Exceptions are few in number and of limited extent: one may think of the adaptation of the Democritean Atomism by Epicurus, or of the so called Neo-Pythagoreanism. Even Empedocles, who was much read until Late Antiquity, owed his lasting popularity not to the attractiveness of his philosophical system as a whole, but rather to his canonical status as a philosophical *poet*, to the isolated survival of his four elements in Aristotle's physics of the sublunary realm, and, last but not least, to the remarkable legend of his lethal leap into the crater of Mt. Etna. The early loss of authority on the part of the Presocratics is mirrored by the fact that the Presocratic period of Greek philosophy has come to be considered an epoche in its own right only at a very late stage. The attempts at saving facets of ancient thought from oblivion and at vindicating their philosophical authority were focused on Aristotle and Plato's *Timaeus* in the first place, then on Platonism as a whole and, finally, on the Hellenistic schools – but a “return to the Presocratics” remained inconceivable until the 19th century.

The first step in this direction was taken by a German poet, Friedrich Hölderlin, who, at the end of the 18th century, transformed the legend of Empedocles' suicide at Mt. Etna from slanderous ridicule into heroic drama: with his tragedy *The Death of Empedocles*, Hölderlin tried to outdo the description of the death of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*.¹ Soon after, the first collections of fragments of individual Presocratics came out among which Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Herakleitos der Dunkle* (1808) takes pride of place.² Yet even Schleiermacher did, of course, not dream of pulling down Plato from his position as the leading philosopher. It was as late as

1 For the background of Hölderlin's *Empedocles* in the contemporary historiography of ancient philosophy see Birkenhauer 1996. A literary predecessor of Hölderlin in the fourth century BC is Heracleides Ponticus; see Schütrumpf & al. 2008, Fr. 82–95 (Περὶ νόσων/Περὶ τῆς ἄπνοου).

2 Schleiermacher 1808, 313–533.

1872 that Friedrich Nietzsche propagated a radical revaluation: he came to believe that the period of decadence which separates us from the truly valuable part of the history of Ancient culture did not begin with the loss of Greek freedom at Chaeronea (338 BC), let alone with the downfall of the West Roman Empire, but already at the time of Socrates and Euripides whom he considers the murderers of tragedy.³ Accordingly, the traditional model status of Ancient culture as a whole must be strictly confined to the “tragic period” of the Greeks – and that means, as far as philosophy is concerned, to the Presocratics.⁴

Nietzsche’s application of his general historical scheme to Greek drama and especially his bold proposition that Richard Wagner of all people is to be credited with the resurrection of Attic tragedy – which had been killed 2.300 years earlier by Socrates and Euripides – was soon refuted by the young Ulrich von Wilamowitz as blasphemous aberration.⁵ By contrast, Nietzsche’s no less novel plea in favour of the “philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks” was much more successful. In the 20th century, this approach was shared, in particular, by Martin Heidegger, who devoted much time and energy to the fragments of certain Presocratic philosophers such as Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, although he sensibly rejected the *en bloc* devaluation of post-Presocratic thought as practised by the more simple-minded ones among Nietzsche’s followers (Heidegger 1954, 113):

“Man meint dann, die frühen Denker seien als die in der Zeitfolge ersten nun auch die schlechthin überragenden, weshalb es sich empfehle, nur noch vorsokratisch zu philosophieren und das Übrige für Mißverständnis und Verfall zu erklären. Solche kindischen Vorstellungen sind heute wirklich im Umlauf.”

As far as classical scholarship is concerned, Nietzsche’s revaluation appears, retrospectively, almost as a prelude to the reconstruction of the Presocratics by Hermann Diels who – torn between admiration and repugnancy – mentions the poet of the *Zarathustra* in the same breath as Heraclitus (Diels 1901a, ix):

“‘Also sprach Herakleitos’ begann aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach dieses Buch. ‘Also sprach Zarathustra’ ist der jüngste Spross dieser vielgepflegten Gattung, die mit dem Pessimismus eine innere Verwandtschaft zeigt. An diesem uns nahestehenden Beispiel sieht man zugleich, wie sich hier Bewusstes und Unbewusstes, Kunst und Manier, klingelnde Spielerei und blutiger Ernst, kluge Berechnung und heller Wahnsinn zu einem ebenso anziehenden wie abstossenden Ganzen vereinigt.”

With an impressive series of scholarly masterpieces Diels prepared the ground for the research performed in the 20th century. The work of his life amounts to a reconstruction of the Presocratics for their own sake, and, as a result of this reconstruction, the early thinkers achieved a palpable group identity for the first time. The success of the enterprise is epitomized in the ambivalent career of the term “Presocratic” which had

3 Nietzsche 1872, 95–238, in particular: 159–172.

4 Nietzsche 1873, 299–371.

5 Wilamowitz 1873. The whole debate is well documented in Gründer 1969.

been in use here and there since the late 18th century.⁶ On the one hand, “Presocratic” acquired a firm terminological status thanks to Diels’s collection *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, on the other hand, the anachronistic reference to Socrates inherent in the term “Presocratic” was soon felt to blur precisely the autonomous status accorded by Diels’s collection to the early thinkers which it denoted (Heidegger 1954, 113):

“Wenn man Parmenides als Vorsokratiker vorstellt, dann ist dies noch t6rrichter, als wenn man Kant als Vorhegelianer kennzeichnen wollte.”

In order to surpass Diels it will of course not do to simply replace the term “Presocratic” by another one while leaving the point of reference unchanged. For Diels’s lasting effect on Presocratic scholarship does not rest on the title *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* or on his views on individual problems of interpretation, but, rather, on the fact that he has opened up a new field of research by providing an infrastructure which has been regulating the ways in which this field has been treated by other scholars ever since. In particular, the basic reconstruction of the ancient doxographic tradition (published in 1879) appeared for a long time to be above scholarly discussion: only at the turn from the 20th to the 21st century, the *Doxographi Graeci* were subjected to a thoroughgoing examination by Jaap Mansfeld and David Runia.⁷

As a result, however, of Nietzsche’s reevaluation and of Diels’s pioneering editorial work Presocratic scholarship *before* 1870 is often perceived as a kind of scholarly Stone Age. This attitude is changing only gradually. For instance, the valuable *Bibliographie Analytique* on the Presocratics edited in two volumes by Paquet, Roussel and Lafrance in 1988–1989 originally started with 1879, the year of publication of the *Doxographi Graeci*; but a few years later, Paquet and Lafrance had it followed by a supplement (1995) dealing with the four centuries from the invention of printing up to the year 1879. And in the *New Pauly*, there is indeed an historical overview of the earlier reception of and the scholarship on the Presocratics⁸ which covers half a millennium from Albert and Aquinas *via* Giordano Bruno, Francis Bacon and Giambattista Vico, up to Hegel and H6lderlin. But within the very limited space available it was, of course, not possible to provide a detailed documentation of the sources from which these illustrious men derived their knowledge of the Presocratics in the first place, or of the philosophical reasons for which they found them interesting.

As far as sources are concerned, it may be useful to remember that already in the Middle Ages countless testimonies on and quotations from the Presocratics were accessible in the West both *via* ancient Latin authors and *via* Graeco-Latin or Arabico-Latin translations of Greek authors. Furthermore, the Greek source authors were studied in the original language from the 15th century onwards. When, and how, the available information was actually brought together, is another matter.

A general framework into which single testimonies and quotations could be fitted was provided by two basic sources. On the one hand, the Presocratics, along with many other Greek authors, are regularly mentioned, at their respective chrono-

6 E. g. Eberhard 1796, 47: “Zweiter Abschnitt. / Wissenschaftliche Philosophie. / Erste Periode. Vorsokratische Philosophie. Ol. XXXV. – LXXXX.”

7 Mansfeld & Runia 1997; Mansfeld & Runia 2009; Mansfeld & Runia 2010.

8 H6hn 2003.

logical place, in the *Chronicle* of Eusebius/St. Jerome which made the chronology of Ancient history and culture up to AD 375 accessible to the Mediaeval West. On the other hand, at least some of the Presocratics are treated in detail in the first two books of the *Vitae philosophorum* by Diogenes Laertius which were accessible in a Latin translation since the 12th century. On that basis, the great Latin chronicles and encyclopedias of the 13th century devote considerable space to the Presocratics: there is a systematic attempt at collecting (Latin) texts relating to the individual thinkers mentioned by Eusebius/St. Jerome or Diogenes Laertius.

In 1573, Henri II Estienne edited the first collection of Greek quotations mainly from the Presocratics, the *Poiesis philosophos*, which covers both poets and prose writers. Estienne's chapters on Empedocles, Parmenides and Orpheus were considerably enlarged and emended towards the end of the 16th century by the great Hellenist Joseph Justus Scaliger; unfortunately, the fruits of Scaliger's labours have never been printed. On the other hand, commentaries on the fragments of individual Presocratics such as Empedocles, Heraclitus, Xenophanes, and Parmenides did not appear before the beginning of the 19th century. Thus, Estienne's *Poiesis philosophos* remained unchallenged for 230 years.

Still another matter is the further reception of the materials brought together in these collections. Studies in the history of that reception seem to be potentially useful on two counts: they can make Mediaeval and early modern contributions to the interpretation of early Greek thinkers accessible to specialists in Presocratic philosophy, and they can, at the same time, locate the reception of the Presocratics within the contexts of Mediaeval and early modern philosophy and scholarship, thereby promoting a better understanding of these contexts.

(i) The standard of editorial work on the Presocratics has unquestionably been revolutionized by Diels's novel method of combining the information provided by Ancient doxography (as reconstructed by Diels himself) with a critically revised text of the original fragments. Yet this does, of course, not imply that each and every pre-Dielsian suggestion concerning the emendation and interpretation of an individual fragment has become obsolete. Presocratic scholarship is still beset with such difficulties, even a hundred years after Diels, that previous approaches towards a solution of these difficulties must not be dismissed without being granted a proper hearing and examination.

(ii) Since the late Middle Ages, Western reconstructions of the less well documented chapters in the history of Ancient philosophy have been shaped by Diogenes Laertius. It is true that Laertius does not present the authors which we call Presocratics as a unified *group*; but he does present them as founders and earliest representatives of the two philosophical schools – Ionian and Italic – to which he allocates all later philosophers. That is the reason why the major Presocratic authors have always formed part of the modern picture of Greek philosophy as a whole: it is not possible to understand this picture without paying attention to the reception of the Presocratics treated by Diogenes.

The present book does not claim to be a comprehensive history of the European reception of the Presocratics, but it offers some elements of such a history. As a starting point, Maria Michela Sassi sketches the history and the impact of the

distinction between an “Ionian” and an “Italic” school of philosophers (chapter 2). This distinction, which goes back to Aristotle, governs the structure of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Philosophers*. Whereas the “Ionian” Presocratics – e. g. Thales of Miletus, Anaximander, Anaximenes and Anaxagoras – are treated in the first two books of Laertius’ *Lives*, the much larger group formed by the “Italic” Presocratics is reserved for books 8 and 9: Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans Archytas and Philolaus; Heraclitus; the Eleatics Xenophanes, Parmenides, Melissus and Zeno; Empedocles; the Atomists Leucippus and Democritus, as well as Diogenes of Apollonia. The Laertian scheme dominated the field down to the 18th century. It is true that it prevented, for a long time, the demarcation of a self-contained Presocratic epoch in the history of philosophy, and it arguably encouraged the very simplistic dichotomy between a rational and a mystic variety of Presocratic philosophy; but the scheme has at least made sure that single Presocratics have always been perceived as part of the history of philosophy.

As early as 1167, Henricus Aristippus translated the first two books of Diogenes Laertius (and perhaps the *Life of Aristotle* from the fifth book) into Latin, whereas books 3–10 of the *Vitae philosophorum* (with the possible exception of the *Life of Aristotle*) remained largely unknown in the Latin West until 1433, when Ambrogio Traversari had accomplished the complete Latin translation requested from him by Cosimo di Medici. That is to say that the Laertian chapters on the “Ionian” Presocratics could be exploited by scholars in the Latin West from the late 12th century onwards. By contrast, testimonies on the “Italic” Presocratics had to be collected, without the guidance of Diogenes Laertius, from classical Latin authors and from Arabico-Latin translations of Greek sources. In order to do justice to this state of affairs the reception of the Presocratics in the Latin Middle Ages has been divided up among two chapters of the present book. Oliver Primavesi describes the Mediaeval scholarship on the “Italic” Presocratics, i. e. on those who are *not* treated in the first two books of Diogenes Laertius; his example are the chapters on Parmenides and Empedocles to be found in French chronicles and encyclopedias of the 13th century, and their reception in the 14th century (chapter 3). Thomas Ricklin, on the other hand, shows that the Mediaeval picture of the “Ionian” Presocratics, i. e. of those who *are* treated in the first two books of Diogenes Laertius, was largely dominated by the early Latin version of these two books; as an example Ricklin has chosen the biographical anecdotes on Thales (chapter 4).

The first collection of Presocratic fragments in the original Greek, the *Poiesis philosophos*, is studied by Oliver Primavesi (chapter 5). It was edited, in 1573, by the French scholar-printer Henri II Estienne in Geneva, and it contains quotations from the works of almost all major Presocratics, not only from the poets, but also, despite its title, from prose writers like Heraclitus and Democritus. Estienne’s reason for introducing his work as a collection of fragments (not of early Greek philosophy but rather) of Greek philosophical *poetry*⁹ can be gathered from his dedicatory epis-

9 In that respect, Estienne anticipates not the *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* but rather the *Poetarum philosophorum fragmenta* edited by Diels in 1901; cf. Diels (1901b) VII: “... quicunque ante me philosophorum poesin collegerunt inde ab Henrico Stephano Galliae decore... “.

tle. In the 16th century, the interest in lost Greek philosopher poets and especially in Empedocles was kindled by the revival of the Ancient debate on the legitimacy of didactic poetry. This revival had been triggered by the first publication of Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1508 (*Rhetores Graeci* I), since Aristotle's contention that didactic poems in general and the poems by Empedocles in particular fall short of being poetry seemed to be incompatible with an overtly plausible reading of Horace's *Ars poetica*: according to this reading, it is precisely didactic poetry that is best suited to combine *utile* and *dulce*. The actual Greek texts, however, which were the subject matter both of the Ancient debate and of its Renaissance remake seemed to be irretrievably lost. Hence the special appeal of *fragments* from Greek philosophical poems to the educated reader of the 16th century.

In the middle of the 17th century, the eminent Aeschylean scholar Thomas Stanley published his *History of Philosophy* in four volumes which is here presented by Carl Huffman (chapter 6). Stanley's treatment of Ancient Greek philosophers consists mainly of an anthology of testimonies concerning their lives and doctrines; this is supplemented with some original quotations. Many of these texts and the structure of the whole are taken over from Diogenes Laertius, but the bulk of the Laertian material is almost doubled. Stanley lays particular emphasis on the Presocratics, and more specifically on the earliest representatives of the two schools as distinguished by Diogenes Laertius, i.e. Thales and Pythagoras: he aims at demonstrating that many insights traditionally attributed to Plato and Aristotle are in fact to be found already in their predecessors.

In 1678, Ralph Cudworth, a leading figure among the Cambridge Platonists, published the first and only part of his monumental *True Intellectual System of the Universe*. This remarkable book, to which the late Uvo Hölscher called attention when exploring the sources of Hölderlin's *Death of Empedocles*,¹⁰ constitutes a large-scale refutation of all kinds of philosophical atheism. Catherine Osborne (chapter 7) shows that Cudworth wants to defend the Cartesian dualism of *res extensa* and *res cogitans* against the materialistic and mechanistic reductionism which he ascribes, in particular, to Thomas Hobbes. In his description of the position under attack as well as in its refutation, Cudworth heavily resorts to fragments of Presocratic philosophy, since he thinks that both the right and the wrong way of doing natural philosophy started with the two varieties of what he calls Ancient Atomism. The bad variety, reductionism, is represented by Leucippus and Democritus, since they rejected an incorporeal realm and, by implication, God. True Atomism, by contrast, restricts its claims to the corporeal realm while acknowledging the existence of an incorporeal realm as well, so that space is left for the assumption of the existence of God. This commendable attitude originated, according to Cudworth, with the Phoenician Moschos (= Moses) and was later adopted by Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Empedocles, as well as by other Presocratics.

Pierre Bayle's famous *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1695/1696), too, is marked by the display of scholarly and critical rigour in the service of a pious ultimate goal, as Glenn Most shows (chapter 8). Bayle's article on Anaxagoras ex-

10 Hölscher 1965, 13–14.

emphasizes a fundamental contradiction that is characteristic of the whole enterprise: on the one hand, almost excessive praise is bestowed on Anaxagoras' steadiness of character and his exceptional intelligence, on the other, his main doctrines are subject to devastating criticism. This contradiction is bound to encourage scepticism since it suggests the following inference *a maiore ad minus*: if even the brilliant heroes of the history of philosophy could go astray in such spectacular ways, then the knowledgeability of humankind in general must be very slight indeed. According to Most, however, Bayle meant this scepticism to be of service to the cause of Christian faith: such is the inadequacy of human reason, that objections springing from it against the Christian revelation can be safely neglected.

Quite unlike Cudworth and Bayle, German scholars of the 18th century adopted a *secular* approach to Presocratic philosophy. This is shown by Georg Rechenauer (chapter 9) who examines especially the first volume of Johann Jacob Brucker's influential *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deducta* (1742), but also refers to Dieterich Tiedemann's *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie* (1791) and to the first volume of Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1798). Brucker explicitly champions the separation of philosophy not only from the *eruditio universalis*, but also from theology. In his presentation of Greek philosophy, he still adheres to the Laertian distinction between the Ionian and the Italic schools, so that the Presocratic members of both schools are separated from each other by a wide gulf. It was only Tiedemann who freed himself from that distinction and introduced the strictly chronological order of presentation. On the basis of that chronological order, the epoch marked by Socrates becomes once again as evident as it had been for Cicero.¹¹ Especially Tiedemann's successor Tennemann presents the history of Presocratic philosophy as a *development* which ends with and leads to the appearance of Socrates.

The early 19th century is marked by the first fragments collections devoted to individual Presocratic authors.¹² From among these collections, we have singled out for special treatment Schleiermacher's groundbreaking edition of Heraclitus which is analysed by André Laks (chapter 10). Laks emphasizes Schleiermacher's admirable exposition of the methodological problems arising (i) from the *fragmentary* transmission of Heraclitus' book, (ii) from his proverbial if – according to Schleiermacher – unintentional *obscurity* and (iii) from the doubtful reliability of the various ancient reports. On this last point, Schleiermacher's assessment differs considerably from Hegel's, as Laks shows in a separate section: Schleiermacher emphatically rejects Aristotle's testimony in book IV (Γ) of the *Metaphysics* while Hegel regards this text as the very basis of any reconstruction; Schleiermacher proposes an ontological reading of the testimony by Sextus Empiricus (translated by Laks in an appendix), while Hegel prefers an epistemological reading; Hegel regards the works of Parmenides and Heraclitus as early stages of *one single* development, whereas Schleier-

11 Cicero, *Tusc.* 5, 4, 10.

12 Besides Schleiermacher's *Heraclitus* there are fragment collections, provided with commentary, on Empedocles (Sturz 1805; Karsten 1838), Xenophanes (Karsten 1830), and Parmenides (Karsten 1835).

macher divides them up among the two halves of a new, speculative version of the old Laertian dichotomy.

Walter Leszl elucidates, in chapter 11, the relationship between the various ways in which Georg Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Eduard Zeller dealt with the Presocratics. First of all, this chapter complements Laks's section on the relation between Schleiermacher's *Heraclitus* and Hegel in that Leszl's text of reference is Schleiermacher's lecture on *Geschichte der Philosophie* which was published only posthumously in 1839. Furthermore, Leszl shows how Eduard Zeller, in the subsequent versions of his tremendously influential *Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, emancipated himself gradually from Hegel: in his beginnings, Zeller depended on Hegel's speculative construction of the history of philosophy according to his *Logic*. Later in life, however, Zeller laid an increasing emphasis on the role that the observation of *Nature* played in the development of Presocratic Philosophy. Even so, Zeller never completely abolished the idea that the history of philosophy can be described as a teleological development.

Friedrich Nietzsche's work on the Presocratics is dealt with by Christof Rapp who comments both on the Basle lectures on *Die vorplatonischen Philosophen* and on the unfinished manuscript entitled *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* (chapter 12). Rapp compares Nietzsche's influential program of a fundamental reevaluation of the Presocratics with what Nietzsche has to say on the single thinkers. The result is that, from a modern point of view, the *pars destructiva* appears more convincing than the *pars constructiva*: it was justified and useful to reject the teleological view of Hegel and Zeller, who had perceived the Presocratics as forerunners of Plato and Aristotle. However, Nietzsche's contention that the Presocratics constitute a succession of great individuals which are great precisely because of their onesidedness leaves something to be desired, and his further contention that this onesidedness is sufficiently illustrated in each case by one anecdote, and one only, is not equally illuminating in all cases. Thus, Nietzsche's comments on the individual thinkers remain somewhat imbalanced and sketchy.

Paul Tannery's *Pour l'histoire de la science hellène* (1887) which Gábor Betegh analyses in chapter 13 is the work of a brilliant outsider: after graduating from the *École Polytechnique*, Tannery worked as a technical civil servant for the administration of the French tobacco monopoly. Nevertheless, Tannery, who already made use of Diels's *Doxographi Graeci*, has in his own way done away with the teleological reconstruction of Presocratic philosophy just as radically as Nietzsche did. For Tannery, the history of the Presocratics does not form part of the prehistory of the *Metaphysics*, as Aristotle would have it. It is rather the central chapter of a history of early Greek *science* – this is the programmatic meaning of Tannery's book title.

Jaap Mansfeld concludes the book with a comprehensive presentation of the admirable oeuvre devoted to the Presocratics by Hermann Diels (chapter 14): from the dissertation on pseudo-Galen (1870) which was supervised by Hermann Usener and which was the starting point of what was to become the *Doxographi Graeci* (1879), via the critical review of Bywater's edition of Heraclitus (1877), the edition of Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* (1882–1895), and the individual editions of Parmenides (1897) and Heraclitus (1901) as well as the *Poetarum Philosophorum Frag-*

menta (1901), up to the four consecutive editions of the *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (1903–1922). Mansfeld takes a particular interest in Diels's views on the relationship between *mythos* and *logos* in the Presocratics. These views are more complex than is usually acknowledged: it is true that Diels adopted a theory which ascribes to Empedocles both a clear-cut opposition between science and mysticism and a biographical development from one of these poles to the other – a theory very much in tune with the predilection among German 19th century classicists for developmental hypotheses as an expedient for the solution of real or apparent difficulties of interpretation. And yet, it would be wrong to see in this theory not an honest effort to deal with difficult evidence but merely the result of anachronistic prejudice: in the case of Anaximander, the same Diels was quite willing to accept a *coincidentia oppositorum* of *mythos* and *logos*.

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