

Christian Vassallo (Ed.)

## Physiologia

Topics in Presocratic Philosophy and its Reception in Antiquity

Jochen Althoff, Sabine Föllinger, Georg Wöhrle (Hg.)

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**Topics in Presocratic Philosophy  
and its Reception in Antiquity**

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# Introduction

## New Perspectives in Presocratic Studies

Christian Vassallo

οὐ δεῖ <ὄς> παῖδας τοκεῶνων, τοῦτ'  
ἔστι κατὰ ψιλόν· καθότι παρειλήφμεν.  
(Heraclit., DK 22 B 74 = fr. 89 Marcovich)

In the last few decades, scholarship's interest in Presocratic philosophy has concentrated more and more on its reception in antiquity (and beyond). This trend is confirmed by the most recent book series on Presocratic studies, one openly devoted to the Presocratic tradition (*Traditio Praesocratica*<sup>1</sup>). The present volume follows this research approach and attempts, thanks to the contributions of various scholars, to investigate some of the most significant topics in the field of Presocratic philosophy, poetry, and doxography. The title of the volume recalls Aristotle's famous definition of Presocratics as φυσιολόγοι,<sup>2</sup> but its content goes beyond questions strictly connected to the investigation of nature. For this reason, it has been divided into two parts: the first part is properly devoted, on the one hand, to the doxographical and literary questions raised by the Presocratics, and, on the other, to their philosophical reception in antiquity; the second part explores the scientific and epistemological problems they tackle, with some additional references to the field of ethics.

At the beginning of the first part of the present volume, Michael M. Pozdnev (*Glaukon von Teos und die Anfänge des wissenschaftlichen Denkens*), a specialist in the field of Presocratic poetry, analyzes, for the first time in a systematic way, the critical thought of Glaucon, an author ranked by Plato among the famous 'Homeric professors' of the age (*Ion* 530c-d). In the extant testimonia, the name of Glaucon can, in

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1 This is the title of a renowned De Gruyter series, edited by Richard D. McKirahan, Denis O'Brien, Oliver Primavesi, Christoph Riedweg, David Sider, Gotthard Strohmaier, and Georg Wöhrle. The last volume of this series concerns the tradition of Xenophanes: see B. Strobel-G. Wöhrle, *Xenophanes von Kolophon*, In Zusammenarbeit mit E. Wakelnig, Mit papyrologischen Beiträgen von Ch. Vassallo, Berlin-Boston 2017. On the fruitful outcomes of this methodological approach to the Presocratics, see the several books published in the last few years in the parallel De Gruyter series *Studia Praesocratica*. The vast range of topics covered by this last series is confirmed by the forthcoming volumes by Ch. Vassallo (ed.), *Presocratics and Papyrological Tradition*, Proceedings of the International Workshop held at the University of Trier (22-24 September 2016), Berlin-Boston, in press, and Id., *The Presocratics in the Herculaneum Papyri: Texts, Translations, and Commentary*, Berlin-Boston, in preparation.

2 This name appears in several works of Aristotle, and in particular in *Metaphysics* (A 5, 986b14; 8, 989b30-31; 990a3; 9, 992b4-5; Δ 23, 1023a21; K 6, 1062b22).

fact, be attributed to different people. A critic of the same name, cited by Aristotle with approval in the *Poetics* (25, 1461b), is likely a Homeric scholar, probably connected with the person that Plato mentions. Even more uncertain is the link between these two figures and Glaucôn of Teos, a writer on poetry to whom Aristotle refers in Book 3 of *Rhetoric* (Γ 1, 1403b26). Finally, Porphyry's attribution of a certain Homeric interpretation to the same author (*Quest. Hom.* I 168 Schrader) is based on conjecture. Notwithstanding these uncertainties, Pozdnev shows how many parallels make Glaucôn a rhapsodist critic engaged in writing on the performance and interpretation of the Homeric poems. The rhapsodic interpretation, as attested in *Ion* (530b10-d8), was considered undemanding by supporters of the hyponoetic meaning of poetical texts (as we know, this trend became fashionable among the intellectuals of the Sophistic age: cf. Xen., *Symp.* 3, 5-6). Yet Glaucôn defended the 'rhapsodic' approach, a method characterized by adhering to the explicit meaning of the text, poem, etc. Consequently, he formulated the fundamental research principle, whose value extends far beyond Homeric philology: in order to reduce the subjectivity of interpretation, one should presuppose that the given text is meaningful and read correctly. Thus, the attempt to reconstruct, even if only partially, the portrait of a thinker helps us to trace the epistemological debate of R. Bentley's time back to the earliest writers on literature.

Maria Protopapas-Marneli (*Héraclite et Marc Aurèle : Sur une interprétation stoïcienne des fragments d'Héraclite*) deals with Marcus Aurelius as a source for Heraclitus. In his *Meditations*, the Roman Stoic philosopher of late antiquity focuses not only on the Stoics of his time (e.g. Diognetus the Stoic) or previous Stoics (e.g. Epictetus) but also on Presocratic philosophers, such as the Pythagoreans, and on Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, etc. But his interest in Heraclitus derives from the Stoics' predilection for his philosophy and his theory of *Logos* as an igneous Principle of the world. In conclusion, Protopapas attempts to demonstrate that Heraclitus' way of thinking as well as his way of writing considerably influenced Marcus Aurelius' thought.

Christian Vassallo (*The Legacy of Heraclitean Logos in Plotinus' Ontology*) examines another aspect of the Heraclitean tradition, focusing on the meaning and the role of *Logos* in Plotinus' ontology and attempting to understand in what way and to what extent the *Enneads* could have been inspired by Heraclitus on this point. Revealing itself as more than an easy *function* of the superior hypostasis, Plotinus' *Logos* (above all in the treatise *On Providence*) seems to gain a (meta-)ontological *autonomy* that situates it somehow on a parallel level alongside the One. Nevertheless, while Plotinus often identifies the One, although indefinable, with the Good, the *Logos* gathers all the contradictions of Being, guaranteeing it the same 'rationality' that Heraclitus' *Logos* gave the conflict among opposites in the world.

Manfred Kraus (*Sind die δοκοῦντα? Grammatisch-Textkritisches zu Parmenides, Fr. 1, 32*) focuses on the crucial passage that traces a transition from Parmenides' proem to the main part of his work and that suffers from a long-standing textual problem. Scholars have been divided between the two transmitted readings  $\text{περῶντα}$  and  $\text{περ ὄντα}$ . While the traditional reading  $\text{περῶντα}$  encounters difficulties on the semantic



level,  $\pi\epsilon\rho\ \delta\upsilon\tau\alpha$  likewise poses serious grammatical and linguistic problems. Kraus accurately discusses the pros and cons of both readings and the consequences of each interpretation, and finally offers a new suggestion for a way out of the dilemma.

Massimo Pulpito (*On the Incipit of Melissus' Treatise*) writes on Melissus and argues that his treatise was structured as a linear deduction of the features of being. In this context, the opening section of the book, which probably contained the fundamental premise on which the deduction was based, plays an important role. However, experts are far from a consensus in the debate over the recognition of a plausible *incipit* of the treatise. There are, in fact, two texts drawn from Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, both of which different scholars recognize as plausible openings. In his contribution, Pulpito attempts to demonstrate that: a) the debate has not yet produced arguments that may allow us to overcome this *impasse*, and b) that a series of elements suggests that one of the texts is inauthentic, while the other potentially constitutes the *incipit* of the book.

G rard Journ e's paper (*La tradition « pr socratique » des Placita*) completes the doxographical section of this volume. A little more than the half of the lemmata of A tius' lost work mention the so-called Presocratic thinkers at a frequency all the more surprising because their number remains a minority in the *corpus*. While it is possible to explain this frequency in part due to the fact that these thinkers represent mostly atypical opinions that are therefore worth mentioning in a book aimed at covering the diversity of ancient tenets, it cannot be denied that this proportion remains striking, especially in regards to the state of the transmission of their texts, of which none (or almost none) have come down to us directly. Journ e examines this issue by addressing the question of the transmission of the *corpus* of the Ps.-Plutarch and the loss of its sources, A tius or, ultimately, Theophrastus.

Opening the second part of the volume, Aldo Brancacci (*On the Principle of Anaximander*) concentrates on the notion of  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta$  in the Milesians and attempts to highlight the peculiarity and originality of Anaximander's principle by framing the topic in its philosophical and cultural context. The scholar accomplishes this inquiry through a comparison with: a) the Aristotelian reflection on the cause's notion; b) the differences between the doctrine of Anaximander and mythical thought (especially Hesiod); c) the sources of ancient philosophical historiography concerning Anaximander's thought.

Sylvana Chrysakopoulou (*La th ologie de X nophane*) focuses instead on the figure of Xenophanes and on the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition of his view of God. In Plato's *Sophist*, Xenophanes is considered the founder of the Eleatic school, while in the *Republic* he is presented as the first 'theologian' (in the sense that the word  $\theta\epsilon\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\alpha$  takes on in Plato's dialogue). Last but not least, according to the fragments and the testimonia ascribed to him, Xenophanes could be considered the precursor of Aristotle's theology in his introduction to the *Metaphysics* and the *De Caelo*.

Leonardo Franchi's paper (*Alcune osservazioni sul procedimento logico di Parmenide*) concentrates on the role of  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  in Parmenides, whose philosophy is con-

sidered to be a ‘logical’ one by most scholars. The paper aims to inquire into the logical elements of Parmenides’ poem, beginning with the etymology of the noun *logic*, viz. “concerning the *logos*.” In light of a doxographical tradition inaugurated by Aristotle and followed by G.W.F. Hegel, Franchi tries to demonstrate that the *λόγος* occupies a central role in Parmenides’ philosophy.

In Andrei V. Lebedev’s essay (*Alcmaeon of Croton on Human Knowledge, the Seasons of Life, and Isonomia*), two new fragments of Alcmaeon are presented: the first comes from Aristotle (anonymous quotation) and the other from a medieval Arabic source (*Turba Philosophorum*). The former concerns knowledge and is a direct continuation of B 1, and the latter focuses on the subject of *φυσιολογία* as it concerns the analogy of the microcosm and macrocosm between human ages and the seasons of nature. These two sections are preceded by an introduction, in which Lebedev proposes a new reconstruction (reading and interpretation) of fragment B 1. The result is a substantial reinterpretation of Alcmaeon’s epistemology and method that refashions him as a radical empirist and sensualist who politely left aside Pythagorean speculative metaphysics as divine knowledge inaccessible to mortals. Furthermore, the scholar defends the only ancient evidence (in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics A*) on Alcmaeon’s acme (ca. 500 BC) against other authoritative attempts to redate him to the second half of the 5th century. This dating would, in turn, invalidate the position of those who deny the reliability of the evidence according to which Alcmaeon discovered the function of the brain by the empirical method of anatomical dissection (or at least observation), since such empirical method corresponds exactly to the methodological credo of empiricism proclaimed in B 1.

Victor Gysembergh’s paper (*Democritus and the Ensuing Degeneration of Scientific Atomism: A Suggestion*) also contributes to the history of science, focusing on an important paradox of Democritus’ legacy, provocatively termed “the degeneration of scientific atomism.” He suggests that this paradox can be accounted for in terms of the “methodology of scientific research programs” associated with I. Lakatos: under the influence of Eudoxus of Cnidus, a rival research program centered on geometry seems to have emerged and to have made such theoretical and empirical progress as to overtake the atomists in the course of a few decades.

The volume is worthily concluded by Michele Solitario (*La riflessione sul piacere nell’Apologo di Eracle di Prodicus di Ceo*), who deals with the relationship between *φυσιολογία* and ethics. The scholar analyzes the concept of pleasure in the famous apologue of Prodicus’ *Heracles at the Crossroads* (Xen., *Mem.* II 21-34). In this text, the arguments are, on the one hand, strictly connected with the Presocratic tradition, but, on the other hand, they anticipate the following developments of the question. In particular, Prodicus argues that, beginning from the existence of material needs, the ancient *φυσιολόγοι* have studied with the method of *πλήρωσις*: viz. pleasure would derive from the satisfaction of a need that fills the lack of the desired object. Prodicus, however, along with need and desire, also adds time as a factor of pleasure: as a matter of fact, pleasure would be generated only if need is satisfied at the right moment. Further-

more, one must choose only long-lasting pleasures. Therefore, Prodicus' hedonism is not irrational but rather grounded on the precise calculation of advantages, as generally occurs in the Sophistic *milieu* of that period (see Antisthenes) and in Socrates' thought (as attested by Plato's *Protagoras*).

Now that I have concluded the exposition of the content of this collective volume, I must sincerely thank those who have contributed to its publication. Additionally, some of them<sup>3</sup> spoke or participated in the discussion at the International Workshop *Presocratics and Papyrological Tradition* held at the University of Trier from the 22nd to the 24th of September, 2016. I am extremely grateful to the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* for financing this publication within my research project *Die Vorsokratiker in den Herkulanensischen Papyri*; to Leonardo Franchi and India Moore Watkins for helping me to revise the proofs. A special thanks goes to Georg Wöhrle for encouraging and supporting the publication of this volume, and also to the other editors of the *AKAN-Einzelschriften*, for accepting it in this prestigious series.

Christian Vassallo  
Trier, 12 August 2017

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3 I refer, in particular, to Aldo Brancacci, Sylvana Chrysakopoulou, Victor Gysembergh (whose paper, read on that occasion, is presented here in a reworked and extended version), Andrei V. Lebedev, and Manfred Kraus.