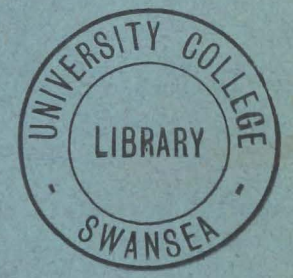


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*Inaugural Lecture of the
Professor of Classics
delivered at the College
on November 16, 1956*



by

PROFESSOR G. B. KERFERD
M.A. (OXON.), B.A. (MELBOURNE)



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA

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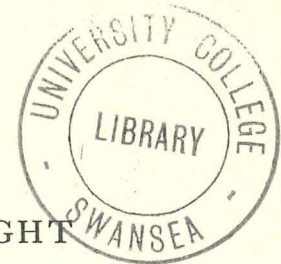
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THE STUDY OF GREEK THOUGHT

TEACHERS of Classics in universities are not always very happy persons. I have known a good number of them and am myself one of them, and this at least is what my experience leads me to think. I don't mean to say that we can be picked out in a crowd because of our melancholy expressions or that we are heard to laugh less frequently than other people. But when it comes to a discussion of the position of Classics in university education, there is very often an unexpressed feeling of frustration which if not checked could easily make us into rather sombre and miserable creatures. I believe that similar feelings are not unknown to teachers of Classics in schools when they consider the present position and future prospects of their subject. The reason for all this is very simple and easy to see. The teachers of subjects other than Classics can usually look forward to growth and expansion—to increasing numbers of students and a reasonable hope that the status of their subject will improve and with it of course their own importance as teachers of that subject. This may lead to a certain smugness and complacency. But, in itself, it is surely both a legitimate and a gratifying experience—a faith in one's subject coupled with the expectation that the value of this subject will be increasingly recognized by others.

This happy experience is very largely denied to the teacher of Classics. For teachers of Classics are to a certain extent set apart, and set apart in a way in which they would very much rather not be set apart. Classical teachers look back to a time when Classics played a more important part in the educational scheme of the country, both in school and university, than it does at the present

time, and than it is ever likely to play again. Indeed the future may seem even darker. For the forces which have produced the present situation are still in operation and are likely to continue in operation for as far as we can see. It is this which leads some teachers of Classics to regard themselves as survivors from the past, in danger of being left stranded as the main stream of education rushes past them in full flood.

Now it may be that this is to paint the picture too darkly. Certainly there are some teachers of Classics who think that such matters should not even be spoken of, at any rate before the non-Classical academic world. For they fear that by speaking about them we may simply intensify the processes which we describe and deplore. But on the whole it is probably better to face up to the situation. For this reason I would like to begin my lecture by asking very briefly two questions: What were the most important reasons for the dominant position which Classics held in education in the past, and how far are those reasons of any significance to us at the present day?

In the Renaissance period and the period immediately afterwards it seems to me that the really important reasons were four. First, Latin had always been a universal language—it was the language of the Church, of scholarship, of law and diplomacy both nationally and internationally. To a decreasing but not inconsiderable extent it was also a language for the writing of poetry, and in all spheres it provided a mould or framework for the expression of any and every kind of serious thought. The need for a knowledge of Latin in such a situation was hardly open to question.

Secondly, the revival of the study of Classical antiquity which began about 1100 and culminated between A.D. 1400 and 1600 led to the rediscovery of a vast amount of scientific and technical knowledge which was in advance

of the knowledge of the day. For a not inconsiderable period the advance of science and the search for technical proficiency required continuous study of the ancient world, above all of the newly discovered writings of the Greeks.

Thirdly, there was the exciting rediscovery of a great literature and later of a great art. The art and literature of the Greeks and Romans seemed clearly superior to anything produced in the Middle Ages, and it was a long time before the claim could be seriously entertained that the national literatures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could stand comparison with the glories of antiquity.

Fourthly, there was the rediscovery of exciting ideas in philosophy, in politics, and in almost every sphere of intellectual activity, ideas which like the art and literature of the Greeks and Romans seemed greater and finer than anything achieved subsequently.

These four reasons were quite sufficient to secure a dominant position for Classical studies in the period which began with the Renaissance. Put simply they involved the recognition, justified or unjustified, that the civilization of the Greeks and Romans was in nearly every respect a higher civilization than that of contemporary Europe.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the position was rather different. First, Latin had virtually ceased to be a universal language. In addition the greater part of the scientific and technical discoveries of the Greeks and Romans had already been appropriated and science was beginning to press far beyond anything known to the ancients. Great modern cultures had already emerged though the need for their separate study was slow in achieving recognition, and the dominant position of Greece and Rome in literature was ripe for challenge.

None the less in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the very important role played by the Classics in education was maintained and in many ways was greatly extended.

First of all the greatness of Greek and Roman literature and of Greek art remained unchallenged, although there was a growing awareness of the greatness of certain modern literatures including English literature. A similar situation obtained in the case of philosophical and other ideas. In addition the emergence of history as a separate study, the awareness of the need for an historical approach to many problems and eventually to almost all problems, meant that the study of the ancient world became a necessary part of the study of civilization. Then the interesting theory was eventually formulated that the detailed study of languages, above all of the ancient Classical languages, gives a formal training to the mind which enables it to grapple more effectively with problems of many different kinds—problems of administration, business, and politics—and to grapple with them more effectively than an untrained mind could hope to do. Finally, I think there emerged something which might be called a conscious educational ideal—the ideal of an educated man. And in this ideal a knowledge and understanding of tradition and of the Classics played an important part.

If these or something like them were the main reasons for the position given to the Classics in education during the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth century, the situation is changed again at the present time. Two factors in particular are now of the greatest significance. Firstly, education in school, and to a large extent in universities and other tertiary educational institutions, has become universal. If we ask now what should be the place of Classics in our educational system we are

asking not what should be the education of a section of the community but what should be the education of all. Secondly, we have to deal with something which is very simple and at the same time very important. To be of much use in the modern world you have got to acquire a great deal of knowledge both general and special in character—so much knowledge indeed that the person who hasn't secured a considerable part of it at the end of his period of full-time education is handicapped in his own career and is a liability to the community until his deficiencies are remedied more or less, later on in life. This means that the time taken is now an important element in assessing the relative merits of any educational discipline. The traditional Classical education required a great deal of time for its successful prosecution. This means that most of the formal arguments in its favour are now very much weakened. It is the needs of the community which for better or for worse must shape the main lines of education in the future. It is the changing needs of the community which are responsible and will continue to be responsible for the changing position of Classics in the educational system of the country. This is the reason for the decline in the status of Classical studies, and the consequent sadness of many professional teachers of Classics.

Confronted with this situation the person who would argue for the retention of the Classics has in principle only two courses open to him. He can say that the Classics are of no use and glory in their uselessness. They are of no use to the community in its brash modern demands, but man is not born to be the slave of the modern community. It is because they are of no use that the study of the Classics is so valuable—they lead us to an appreciation of values and beauties more permanent and more lasting than the ephemeral and mostly unpleasant productions

of modern societies. This is a line of argument often followed by teachers of Classics. I do not think it is wrong, but it is not one which can help the teacher of Classics very much in his present difficulties. For the modern community is going to be far too busy and far too interested in its own functions to allow more than a minor place to such a study in its educational system. If we class Classical studies as a luxury when seen from the point of view of the community we are inviting the community to economize in its use of that luxury—to restrict such a luxury to a few whom the community can afford to keep in intellectual and spiritual affluence. And the community is likely to be only too willing to accept us at our own estimation in this respect.

The other line of argument is one which I myself would regard as more fruitful. For it seems to me that it is precisely because they are useful that Classical studies deserve to be preserved and fostered. And by 'useful' I mean useful to the modern community in its own functions, however desirable or undesirable these functions may seem. I would rest my case on a few simple, and to me completely persuasive, propositions.

First. No amount of technical or professional knowledge can be sufficient in a modern community without some understanding of the nature and functioning of the community in which we live. It must be one task of an educational system to see that each member of the community has as thorough and profound an insight into the community as can be secured with the time and means available. This is my first proposition—we need to understand the community and the civilization in which we live.

Second. We can only understand our civilization by studying something of its past. A purely analytic and non-historical approach can never give us the under-

standing we need. We must study our own history in order to understand ourselves. This is the second proposition.

Third. No one can hope, even if he is a professional historian, to study all the material that is available about our own past. Still less is this possible for someone who is actively engaged in quite different pursuits. Clearly we must focus attention on those aspects and periods of history which are most important for our purpose—and our purpose is to understand the present.

Fourth. We must not suppose that the most recent periods of history are always or necessarily the most important for the purpose of understanding the present. The criterion must always be that of importance for the purpose in mind. One of the most important periods is in fact that of Classical antiquity, which saw both the advent of Christianity and the framing of a series of ideas and categories of thought which we still use every day, and without which we could hardly do anything of what we do. There is a sense in which the history of Britain began in Greece in the sixth century before Christ, and without understanding something of what happened then we cannot hope to understand ourselves now.

These four propositions seem to me to establish the usefulness of the study of Classical antiquity for the purposes of modern societies. To understand ourselves we must understand our past and to understand our past we must understand something of the thought of the Greeks. And I believe that teachers of Classics should in no sense feel that by their profession they are cut off from the main stream of the community in which we live. I hope that the community may come to feel the same about us.

This brings me by a somewhat roundabout route to what I have chosen as the title of this lecture, the study

of Greek thought. If I am right in my argument the fact that the Greeks thought the way they did is one of the most important things that has happened to us. It ranks on a par with Christianity in its all-pervasive influence upon our current ways of thought and action. It is here that is to be found the ultimate source of distinction between Western civilization and other civilizations, and the source of its superiority in comparison with other civilizations. If our science were all destroyed by an atomic explosion and our scientists and books as well, but if the human race survived, we could hope to re-create all that had been lost if we followed again the path traced out by the Greeks, and we can know that we could never re-create it unless we could find that one path again. For it is simply the path of rational investigation into any problem whatever its character.

The story of how the Greeks found this path and held to it is one of the most interesting stories there is and it is far too little known. It is a source of great pleasure to me that at Swansea I succeed one who gained distinction in this field of study among others, and who gave it a proper place in the courses of study in this College, Professor Farrington. It is with considerable humility that I accept the responsibility of carrying on this work and I can claim as a qualification only that I believe completely in its importance. For here is something that ought to be better known than it is, and one of the problems facing Classical teachers should be to see how more of the thought of the Greeks and its extension through Rome can be brought to students and pupils in schools throughout the country. I have my own ideas as to how some of this work might be done, but I do not wish to develop them here.

Instead I should like to speak in a little more detail about one part of this study to which I am attaching so

much importance, the study of Greek thought. The story of the beginnings of Greek thought is the story of the birth of science and the commencement of philosophy. Though important and fascinating it is not altogether simple. Like many other stories about the past it has its traditional form which is fairly certainly not quite true, and its more modern versions which are perhaps nearer the truth. The attempt to make these versions still closer to the truth is one of the more lively and interesting branches of Classical study at the present time. The traditional form of the story goes something like this: Thales of Miletus early in the sixth century B.C. asked out of what is the physical world made and he gave as his answer 'water'. It is of little importance now that we have come to believe that his answer was wrong. Thales was the first person to ask the right sort of question and to offer the right *sort* of answer. In doing this he was in effect the first physical scientist. He was certainly no less of a scientist for giving the wrong answer to the right questions. For it has probably been rare in the history of science that the first answer given by a scientist to any question was completely right and very frequently indeed the first answer has been completely wrong. However that may be, Thales was followed by Anaximander who declared that the world was made of a neutral stuff or matter out of which particular physical substances developed by a process of separation out reminiscent of what is achieved in a centrifuge. He in turn was followed by Anaximenes who held that the primary substance was a sort of mist which by thickening and thinning became transformed into the various constituents of the world as we know it. Thereafter the stream divided and flowed through various channels—one stream led to a distrust of the evidence of the senses and the demand that part of our experience must be rejected as untrue. This in turn

led on to the philosophies or sciences of Plato and Aristotle, both of whom attempted to give once again a complete account of human experience. Another stream led to the development of the doctrine that the world is composed of atoms uniform in substance and differing only in size, shape, and weight. And there were many side channels in addition to the main streams. None of the answers would satisfy us now, but that is because we have improved upon the answers to questions which the Greeks were the first to give.

Such briefly is the story in its traditional form. While it is not wrong it rests upon certain presuppositions which we can now see fairly seriously distort the truth. Perhaps the first to realize the importance of the story was the philosopher Hegel. Much more than is usually supposed the distorting presuppositions also go back to Hegel. His views can be found in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. These were first delivered at Jena in 1805-6, but were published in 1831 after his death. As was natural at that time, two-thirds of these lectures were devoted to the history of Greek philosophy. Indeed Hegel could look back to a time not much more than a century earlier when it was commonly supposed that philosophy belonged only to the ancient world and came to an end with it. Pagan philosophy was replaced by Christian theology and there could be no philosophy other than ancient philosophy. Hegel did not hold this view and he protested on other grounds as well against contemporary and earlier histories of philosophy. He claimed that they were too often simply enumerations of opinions, that they made the history of philosophy into a record of innumerable random views and nothing more. Whether or not this criticism was justified, Hegel provided a drastic remedy. He saw the whole history of philosophy as the history of 'Thought finding itself'. To

put the matter into everyday language, and so to put it not quite accurately, we might say that it was as if philosophic truth had a sort of independent existence of its own, complete and perfect in itself before men began to philosophize. This truth then proceeded to reveal itself to thinking men step by step, according to an elaborate logical sequence or plan, the pattern of the Hegelian dialectic. Yet in another sense this truth was not really pre-existent at all but was creating itself in and through the process of revelation. Thus as thinker succeeded thinker his thought fell into place in a pattern spread over the centuries. The movements of any particular philosopher in this philosophic game of chess were determined not by the philosopher himself, not even by the player who moved the pieces, for there was no player, but by the developing pattern of the game and the imperious requirements of the preceding move. Hegel wrote (I quote from the standard English translation of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*):

The whole history of philosophy is a progression impelled by an inherent necessity and one which is implicitly rational and *a priori*, determined through its Idea; and this the history of philosophy has to exemplify. . . . Contingency must vanish on the appearance of philosophy. Its history is just as absolutely determined as the development of Notions and the impelling force is the inner dialectic of the forms.¹

Inspired by such a belief Hegel traced out the history of Greek philosophy in very considerable detail. The particular reconstruction which he offered is perhaps not of great interest at the present time and it will be sufficient to say briefly that it was triadic in form. Each thesis propounded provoked an antithesis or anti-thesis which denied the thesis. From their conflict sprang a synthesis taking up within itself in a new form both thesis and antithesis.

¹ English translation vol. i, pp. 36-37.

Such an *a priori* approach could hardly expect to survive unchallenged in a period concerned with the ever more rigorous application of scientific methods in historical studies. The principles which Hegel had applied were examined and rejected as early as 1843 by Eduard Zeller.¹ In his great work, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*,² which first appeared in the years 1844-52, Zeller is quite explicit. The task of the historian, he said, was not to construct patterns *a priori*, but to reconstruct them positively, *a posteriori* from the facts.

If this is the case, it might very well be asked, why should we still concern ourselves with the *a priori* approach of Hegel? Zeller's history remains the only really full-scale history of Greek philosophy, and in its successive editions—the latest was completed in 1923—its influence has been all-pervasive. Should not the story of Hegel's treatment of Greek philosophy be relegated to the museum of history? The answer is, I think, that in many ways Hegel gave a set of presuppositions to the study of Greek philosophy which have not been completely rejected down to the present day. Although Zeller rejected Hegel's *a priori* approach as such, he accepted very many of Hegel's contentions about the history of philosophy. While he rejected any speculative construction of history, he accepted Hegel's requirement that history could not simply be the collection of isolated opinions and doctrine without concern for their connexion one with another. He wrote in the preface to his second edition, repeated in the third and fourth editions,³ that his object was 'neither on the one hand to collect

¹ See Zeller-Mondolfo, *Filosofia dei Greci*, I. i. 14 n. 1.

² The original title was *Die Philosophie der Griechen, eine Untersuchung über Character, Gang und Hauptmomente ihrer Entwicklung*.

³ The quotation that follows is taken from the English translation of Zeller's work by S. F. Alleyne.

facts in a merely empirical manner; nor, on the other, to construct *a priori* theories; but through the traditions themselves, by means of critical sifting and historical combination to arrive at a knowledge of their importance and inter-dependence'. And while he insisted that the first centre of unity is the individual he insisted also that the individual does not stand alone. 'The free activity of man', he wrote,¹ 'has its inborn measure in the primitive essence of spirit and in the laws of human nature; . . . by virtue of this internal subjection to law, even what is really fortuitous in the individual act becomes necessity in the grand course of historic evolution. To follow this course in detail is the main problem of history.' In other words Zeller too, like Hegel, supposed that there was a pattern in the history of philosophy. He differed from Hegel because he supposed that this pattern could not be discovered *a priori*, but could only be recovered from a study of the recorded facts.

None the less he supposed that the pattern was there, and that it was of a definite kind. 'The history of philosophy too has its own system of laws, in so far as various attempts to solve philosophic problems of knowledge of the world do not merely follow an external, more or less accidental order. One problem rather grows out of another by an inner necessity and one system draws another after it by way of progress or completion, contradiction or contrast.'²

'Inner necessity'—in this Zeller was at one with Hegel. The task of the historian of philosophy was to trace out this inner necessity in the succession of systems and hypotheses. And there was more to it than this. Because Hegel regarded the history of philosophy as the history

¹ English translation vol. i, pp. 21-22.

² Nestle's summary of Zeller's words in the English translation of the 13th edition of Zeller's *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, 1931.

of rational thought in process of self-revelation certain things were excluded altogether from the history of philosophy. First, mythology must be excluded from the history of philosophy because mythology is not rational—'the theorems which are *implicite* contained within religion do not concern us', said Hegel, 'they must be in the form of thoughts, since Thought alone is the absolute form of the Idea'.¹ Secondly, philosophy proper and its history are sharply distinguished from popular thought and 'popular philosophy' as Hegel called it. For this reason Hegel thought that Cicero should be excluded from the history of philosophy. Thirdly, there is not properly any such thing as Oriental philosophy since it is lacking in the necessary rationality. We must not look to the East either for the beginnings of philosophy or for the causes of its beginnings in Greece. Fourthly, social and economic factors cannot explain the self-revelation of reason except in a negative manner. Certain material conditions are indeed necessary for the development of rational thought—men must be free both politically and economically. But when they *are* free they are as it were freed from inhibiting restraints and so the spirit can at length work freely in and through them.

All this is reflected in Zeller's work, though in a less extreme and forthright manner in some cases than in others. The attempt to trace sources of Greek philosophy in the East is emphatically rejected. The history of philosophy is separated from the history of the thought of the Greek world generally as expressed in the main body of Greek literature; social and economic factors are not seriously discussed and while religion and mythology are admitted to be of interest as preparing men's minds for the advent of philosophy, the beginnings of philosophy

¹ *Lect. Hist. Philos.*, English translation, vol. i, p. 83.

are not to be found in them. 'Philosophy in itself begins only there where the problem of the natural causes of things is posed.'¹ It would not be an exaggeration to say that the beginnings of Greek philosophy were regarded as part of the Greek miracle—the first known outburst of rational thought. First, there had been the artistic miracle—the world began, Homer sang. Then much later the first rational man, Thales, asked the question 'of what is the world made?', or perhaps even 'what is the ultimate reality in the universe?', and it was this question which was the beginning of philosophy.

This approach to the study of Greek philosophy had enormous influence. When Hermann Diels in 1903 designed his great collection of fragments and testimonia concerning thinkers before the Socratic schools, he began with Thales, and relegated to an appendix material relating to cosmological and other early thinkers. In the same appendix were the sophists on the understanding that they also were not part of the true history of early Greek philosophy. It was not until 1934 in the fifth edition of Diels' work that this could be altered and the material relating to myth and cosmology was brought forward from the appendix to constitute the opening section of the work. Burnet in his famous book on *Early Greek Philosophy* wrote in the preface to the first edition in 1892 of 'the great authority of Zeller who was the first to recall the history of philosophy from the extravagances into which it had wandered earlier in the century. I am glad to find that all my divergences from his account have only led me a little further along the path that he struck out.' Nor was this simply an empty tribute. For all that he regarded himself as an opponent of the Hegelian interpretation of the history of Greek philosophy,²

¹ *Ph. d. Gr.* I. I⁵. 118.

² Cf. *Early Greek Philosophy*, Preface to the third edition.

Burnet shared the particular beliefs we have been discussing. He wrote in 1914:

We shall have to take account from the first of a mass of cosmogonical and eschatological speculation which influenced philosophy in many ways. These things however are not themselves philosophy, and it cannot even be said that they are the germ from which philosophy developed. It is important to be quite clear about this; for in some quarters Oriental cosmogonies are still paraded as the source of Greek philosophy. The question is not one of cosmogonies at all. . . . These things . . . have nothing directly to do with philosophy. From the Platonic point of view, there can be no philosophy where there is no rational science. It is true that not much is required—a few propositions of elementary geometry will do to begin with—but rational science of some sort there must be. Now rational science is the creation of the Greeks, and we know when that began. We do not count as philosophy anything anterior to that.' (*Greek Philosophy, Thales to Plato*, pp. 3-4.)

Burnet, like Zeller, regarded the task of the historian of early Greek philosophy as primarily that of reconstructing by scholarship what individual thinkers had actually thought and meant as far as this could be done, and secondly that of tracing the relationship between successive thinkers. In a word for Burnet as for Zeller and as for Hegel before him the task of the historian was to trace out the 'internal history' of the development of Greek thought. It is of course true that Burnet offered a materialistic interpretation of the content of early Greek speculation and in this respect departed from the idealism of Hegel and Zeller. But like them he tended to see the history of philosophy as a self-contained progression of ideas.

There is thus a clear sense in which Burnet, Zeller, and Hegel can be said to have shared the same approach to the history of Greek philosophy. On the other hand it must never be forgotten that both Zeller and Burnet rejected

the most distinctive doctrine of Hegel—the *a priori* approach. Indeed it was this which made possible the great achievements in the study of the history of Greek philosophy which we owe to the nineteenth century. For they insisted that whatever patterns be traced in the history of philosophy, they must emerge *a posteriori* from the study of the best available evidence and must never be imposed arbitrarily by the historian upon his material. This of course must remain fundamental to any scientific history of the past. In the case with which we are concerned, the study of the Pre-Socratics, this approach culminated in the two great works of Hermann Diels—the books known as *Doxographi Graeci*, first published in 1879, and the *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* already mentioned, of which the first edition appeared in 1903. The second of these two works was intended to give a complete critical collection of all the fragments of writings by philosophers before the Socratic schools and in addition a selection of the most important statements about them found in later writers. It became immediately and remains to this day an indispensable tool of the workshop for everyone concerned in the study of early Greek philosophy. But an inspection of the testimonia for any one early thinker reveals a bewildering variety of statements. These statements are often inconsistent or contradictory and come from writers often separated by many centuries. They constitute what is called the doxographic tradition, that is the tradition concerning the Doxai or opinions of earlier philosophers. It was the great triumph of Diels in his *Doxographi Graeci* to reduce this really vast mass of material to something like order. By the most painstaking and elaborate scholarship he succeeded in showing that the vast majority of doxographic statements in writers after Aristotle were taken in one way or another from a lost work of Aristotle's

pupil and successor, Theophrastus. This lost work was called *Περὶ φυσικῶν* or *Φυσικῶν δόξαι* and was in sixteen or eighteen books. And not only this, Diels was able to show in a very great number of cases exactly how later writers had used the work of Theophrastus and through what intermediate sources. And so it became possible to evaluate conflicting statements in later writers, and in many cases to decide which has correctly represented what Theophrastus had written and which statement springs from some misunderstanding or distortion of the tradition. Very often we are enabled to offer a probable reconstruction of Theophrastus' original words.

All this was the accomplishment of the nineteenth century. It might well have been thought that here was really the end of the story. Of course it could not be the end of discussion. As Hegel had said, 'Learning prides itself most upon the ancients, for we may be most learned about that of which we know least',¹ and the sheer complication of the evidence would have been sufficient to ensure endless fascinating debate about details. But it might well have been thought that all the rules of the game had been clearly laid down and in this sense we had reached the end of the story. It is, however, now clear that this was not the case, and the way in which it has become clear contains a lesson and a warning. What happened was something like this.

In addition to the work of Theophrastus which was so wonderfully reconstructed by Diels, there were the writings of Aristotle himself. Aristotle had a good deal to say about the views of his predecessors and a favourite way of beginning a treatise was to make a survey of the main views of those who had gone before him. This was done most notably in the first book of the *Metaphysics* which surveys virtually the whole course of Pre-Socratic

¹ *Lect. Hist. Phil.*, English translation, vol. i, p. 171.

thought. Of this Hegel wrote,¹ 'He (Aristotle) is as philosophic as (he is) erudite and we can rely upon him. We can do no better in Greek philosophy than study the first book of the *Metaphysics*.'

This attitude, with some qualifications, long remained typical. And we shall see that there were particular reasons why the first book of the *Metaphysics* should appeal to Hegel. But gradually the suspicion grew that an element of bias was present in Aristotle's account of his predecessors. The evidence for this was exhaustively surveyed by Professor Cherniss in 1935 in a work entitled *Aristotle's Criticism of Pre-Socratic Philosophy*. He showed conclusively the special viewpoint from which Aristotle was writing. Aristotle felt that all previous theories were stammering attempts to express his own doctrines. Accordingly he 'read' his own fundamental ideas into the works of his predecessors whether they were really there or not. In particular he supposed they were all groping after his own doctrine of the four causes, though most of them failed to distinguish more than one of the four, usually the material cause. He regarded his own views as providing the answers to problems which the Pre-Socratics had posed but failed to solve. He regarded his own philosophy as a synthesis of the work of previous thinkers. In fact there is good reason to suppose that the Pre-Socratics were concerned with very different problems from those which concerned Aristotle, and their answers to these different questions had little relation, often enough, to Aristotle's answers to the questions which concerned Aristotle. We reach then the position that Aristotle's account of his predecessors can only be accepted with considerable reserve and must always be controlled by reference to the actual fragments of the writings of the Pre-Socratics when we have them.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

But once bias had been shown for the writings of Aristotle about the Pre-Socratics, it was not difficult to show that the same bias was present in the accounts offered by Theophrastus. Theophrastus was a member of the School of Aristotle and he wrote in the same tradition and with the same categories of thought as the master had done.¹

This means that virtually the whole of our ancient tradition about the earliest Greek thinkers was framed upon strongly Aristotelian lines. The result is paradoxical. Hegel had offered a biased and *a priori* interpretation of early Greek philosophy. Those who came after him rejected the *a priori* approach and turned instead to processes of pure scholarship. They began to sift, compare, and evaluate ancient texts and hoped by so doing to reconstruct a genuinely objective history of early Greek thought. This history they believed would reveal the patterns inherent in the facts without imposing any pattern from without. We can now see that Aristotle's approach was just as much *a priori* as that of Hegel. Of course he did not see his predecessors through the spectacles of the Hegelian dialectic. But he did to a very large extent share the same presuppositions as Hegel when he came to speak about the work of the Pre-Socratics. It may well have been partly for this reason that Hegel had been so enthusiastic about the work of Aristotle. For Aristotle was himself profoundly interested in the rational and logical analysis of the universe and he treated his predecessors as if they shared the same interests. He even thought of his own philosophy as synthesizing the work of his predecessors. As a result

¹ This has now been argued in detail by McDiarmid, 'Theophrastus on the Pre-Socratic Causes' in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. lxi (1953), pp. 85-156. It seems to me that the Aristotelian framework of Theophrastus' approach is certain, but not the derivation of all his information about the Pre-Socratics from the writings of Aristotle.

scholarly investigation by modern scholars was given as deceptive appearance of objectivity. But what was being reconstructed was not the history of early Greek thought but Aristotle's views about this history.

If we change the presuppositions which underlie an investigation, then the questions we ask will change and the answers we give also. And this is what has begun to happen in the study of early Greek thought. I spoke earlier of four particular ways in which the Hegelian approach had affected the investigation of these matters. These were the exclusion of mythology from consideration, the rejection of popular thought and popular philosophy, the denial of any oriental or external sources for Greek philosophy, and the exclusion of social and economic factors from any positive role in the unfolding of rational thought. These exclusions are beginning to be seen as quite unjustified and as a consequence we are beginning to suspect that the traditional story of the origins of Greek thought beginning with Thales, through Anaximander and Anaximenes, Heraclitus and Parmenides, on to Plato and Aristotle, is not really the true story of what happened. Exactly what the true story is it is perhaps too soon to attempt to say. But one or two indications may perhaps be given. The earliest thought of the Greeks both sprang from and was permeated through and through with mythological and religious conceptions. Thales may even have regarded the world as an animal which fed on water—fairly certainly he supposed that it floated upon water and that earthquakes were due to the rocking of the boat by waves. Parmenides was probably as much concerned with a goddess and her position in the universe as with unchanging being. And so on. To understand these mythological and religious ideas we must study the Pre-Socratics in relation to the whole literature of early Greece in so far as it

survives—we must trace the story not from Thales to Plato, but from Hesiod and indeed from Homer to Plato, and earlier yet if we can get the necessary information. While rational thought did emerge from such beginnings, and it was the unique achievement of the Greeks to secure that it did emerge, the process was slow and painful, and philosophy and mythology were not wholly opposed even in the thought of Plato. Before him neither can be adequately studied in isolation from the other. Next we are beginning to see through the recovery of Hittite texts and documents, that early Greek myths were intimately related to much oriental mythology and cosmogony. In this way Greek philosophy *was* after all related to oriental thought and probably to other, perhaps Scythian or Nordic, systems of thought from outside the Greek world. In addition it is clear that social and economic factors are of vital importance for the understanding of the development of early Greek thought. Here we are hampered and will probably always be hampered by shortage of information. But in one case at least we can see fairly clearly. The phenomenon known as the sophistic movement can only be understood in the light of the impact of social and economic change upon accepted ways of thought. All this amounts to a very great change in approach. Once we have dropped the artificial isolation of philosophy from everything else, which could only be justified by tacit assumptions akin to those which Hegel had made about the nature of rational thought, the way is cleared for the study of the whole intellectual history of a community or people. And this in turn is the product of the whole history of the people concerned.

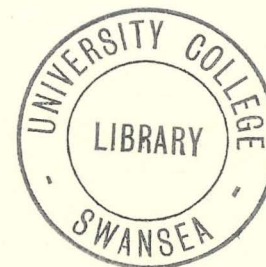
All this is still somewhat dimly seen and tentatively grasped by scholars. At best it constitutes a series of glimpses into what we may hope will one day be a much

better understanding of the history of Greek thought than we possess at the present time. But perhaps one of the significant things is simply this, that it is a programme for research, for the hopeful search for new knowledge in a branch of Classical studies which has already attracted the continued attention of thinkers for a hundred and fifty years or more before the present day. In this respect there is no real difference between the Classical student and the investigator into the physical sciences—each is confronted with limitless fields to investigate, with the hope that determined assault will yield fascinating and exciting new knowledge. And finally most important of all, the possibility in each case of feeling that in studying one's chosen field one is doing something of value and significance to the community in which one lives. To quote some words of Professor Snell of Hamburg:¹

European thinking begins with the Greeks—they have made it what it is: our only way of thinking; its authority, in the Western world, is undisputed. When we concern ourselves with the sciences and philosophy, we use this thought quite independently of its historical ties; to focus upon that which is constant and unconditioned: upon truth; and with its help we hope to grasp the unchanging principles of this life. On the other hand, this type of thinking was a historical growth, perhaps more so than is ordinarily implied by that term.

If I were asked to sum up in a single sentence, I would simply say that we need to study Greek thought because in studying Greek thought we are studying ourselves.

¹ From the Preface to the English edition of *The Discovery of the Mind*, Oxford, 1953.



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