

## BOOK REVIEW

*Anaximander. A Re-assessment.* By ANDREW GREGORY. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Pp. 296 Hardcover ISBN 978-1-4725-0779-2.

This book contains a number of proposals, hypotheses and statements about almost every aspect of Anaximander's thought as it has reached us, spread over ten chapters: (1) Anaximander and Historiography (an introductory chapter that conveniently summarizes the main points on which Gregory disagrees with or casts doubts on current interpretations); (2) Anaximander's Zoogony; (3) Anaximander and Meteorology; (4) The Extant Fragment; (5) The *Apeiron*; (6) Cosmogony and Steering; (7) Anaximander: One *Cosmos* or Many? (8) The Stability of the *Cosmos*; (9) Anaximander's Cosmology and Astronomy; (10) Anaximander's Numbers. Within each chapter, the topic at stake is covered by a series of short sections—one or two pages—with independent headings. One is reminded of powerpoint presentations, which makes for a certain kind of clarity, although not necessarily the one that one would wish.

The book is driven by two main ideas. The first one is that one should pay more attention than is usually done to the steering role of the 'unlimited' (*apeiron*) in the cosmological process as well as in the preservation of the world (30, 43f.), whether steering "involve[s] intelligence along the lines of Plato's *demiurge* or the modern theory of intelligence design" or "the *apeiron* steers the cosmos in the same way as a seed might be said to steer or control the development of a plant' (277). Page 46 seems to indicate a preference for the latter branch of the alternative—which might clash with Gregory's other view that the cosmos once generated will remain in a state of equilibrium (Gregory rejects without really discussing them Jaap Mansfeld's arguments (which I also share) in favour of a "dissipating model", cf. 226).

The second main idea is that Anaximander's thinking is biological and not mechanical in essence (curiously, neither 'biology' nor 'mechanics' appear in the otherwise useful General Index). This view shapes many of Gregory's interpretations and decisions. To take just two examples: should we translate *kata to khreôn*, in Anaximander's fragment (B1 DK), as "according to what is necessary" or "ac-

ording to what is proper”? Gregory goes for “proper”: “Necessity fits a more mechanical interpretation of Anaximander, while if steering is thought to be important, the *apeiron* may steer in a proper or appropriate manner” (68, cf. 46). And should we translate *stomion*, referring to the holes of Anaximander’s celestial rings (Aetius 2.29.1), with “apertures” or “mouths”? In an Addendum (231), Gregory considers the former term, adopted in the course of the book, results from a mechanical approach, and suggest that he should have retained the second one (wrongly, I would say; think of the word ‘orifice’).

Gregory’s general idea about Anaximander’s biological orientation is not as novel as he seems to think. The interested reader will find a vibrant description of Anaximander’s overall achievement, no doubt stemming from other times and horizons—*Lebensphilosophie* was at the order of the day—in Karl Joel’s once influential *Geschichte der antiken Philosophie* (1921), the whole of which is a large scale reaction against mechanical interpretations of early Greek thought: “Das Göttliche ist eben für Anaximander Werdensgrund, der Lebensquell, die zeugende Weltkraft. Er sieht in der Natur die Genesis, die Weltgeburt, die lebendige Entstehung etc.” (258), and he may also look at W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1, 470–71. More generally, Anaximander is not the only Presocratic thinker for whom the alternative biology/mechanics has played a role in the discussion (think of Diego Lanza’s work on Anaxagoras, or studies relative to Diogenes of Apollonia). In this respect, Gregory’s book lacks perspective.

Gregory’s most interesting new proposals concern Anaximander’s zoogony and his meteorology. In the first chapter, Gregory argues that Aetius 5.19.4 = 12 A30 DK, which reports Anaximander’s view about how the first living beings were produced (Gregory takes ‘first’ in the sense of “simplest” or “most basic”, 37), has been misinterpreted. Gregory thinks that the word *akanthôdês*, in the phrase *periekhomena phloioi akanthôdeis*, does not refer to the thorns of primitive ursins-like creatures, but to a twig-shaped envelope of Caddis flies larvae (31–32)—hence the proposed translation *enclosed in spine like barks* instead of the usual *enclosed in thorny barks* (30); the origin of life would not have to be located in salty sea, but in fresh waters (39). Consequently, Gregory takes the comparative ξηρότερον in the relevant sentence as indicating not the transition from sea to land, but the “moving ... onto something relatively drier which may still be significantly moist, such as a submerged stone or log.” (p. 238 n. 8). This looks artificial to me, and of course it does not amount to ‘preserve the comparative’

(*ibid.*), since the comparative in Greek can keep its original function of contrasting two opposite determinations, rather than indicating degrees.

Observational knowledge of metamorphosing larvae (one shared by the young Gregory, cf. 239 n.14) thus replaces speculative imagination or 'genial fantasy' (37; 229). I am not convinced by this interpretation, among other because it leads Gregory to dissociate Aetius' testimony from the reports stating that 'fish or animals very similar to fish' (Censorinus, *De die nat.* 4.7 = 12A30 DK) emerged from heated mud, and then men out of those (cf. 39). On the other hand, the idea that Aetius 3.3.1, which preserves Anaximander's explanation of thunders, lightnings, thunderbolts, hurricane winds and the like, is an explanation in naturalistic terms of five meteorological phenomenon associated with the monster Typhôn in Hesiod's *Theogony*, 845f. ("the conflagration held the purple waters, from the thunder and lightning and the fire from the monster, the hurricane winds and the fiery thunderbolts", 55) looks compelling to me.

To sum up: the book contains a number of suggestions that will need to be in turn re-assessed. Its mode exposition and discussion makes it an adequate tool for introducing students to a wide range of problems raised by the interpretation of Anaximander's thought.

ANDRÉ LAKS

*Université de Paris-Sorbonne*

*Universidad Panamericana, Mexico, D.F., laks.andre@gmail.com*