

BOOK REVIEW

Early Greek Philosophy. 9 volumes. Edited by ANDRÉ LAKS and GLENN W. MOST. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Early Greek Philosophy [EGP] adds nine green volumes and 4093 pages to the Loeb Classical Library (#524–532).¹ They contain a maximum of passages, fragments, and testimonia for nearly all well-attested “philosophical,” “Sophistic,” and para-philosophical authors from Thales’ predecessors Homer and Hesiod to the *Dissoi Logoi* and *Anonymous Iamblichii*—Pherecydes no less than Socrates; Olbian bone tablets no less than the Euripidean-or-Critian “Sisyphus” excerpt; and Armenian recensions of Philo no less than the Syriac aphorisms of Melissus. Nothing in English approaches its comprehensiveness, accessibility, and incisiveness.

In brief, André Laks and Glenn Most give us a brilliant and beautiful reference work that can, at the same time, be easily enough read straight through. And spending a few months doing so gives the reader almost all that she needs (perhaps along with Loeb #258, *Greek Elegiac Poetry*) to reconstruct for herself the origins of the discipline of philosophy. I should want any graduate student or colleague in ancient philosophy or intellectual history to acquire and make their way through it.

Fragmentary material has long had a home in the Loeb Classical Library; but philosophical fragments have only now moved in, with striking phenomenological and practical results. Reading the books, with their lovely formatting, is definitely charming: only a few fragments fit on a page, nearly giving each its own pedestal; the sophisticated apparatus never cramps one’s vision; and *les notes justes* seem to arrive only when one would most desire them.² For sure, the volumes also have their challenging idiosyncrasies: with so few fragments per page, there can be a

¹ It costs a few dollars less than Daniel Graham’s hardback two-volume *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2010), in 1040 pages – \$234 against \$237.

² Typos are rare; I noticed them at 2.367 (“hear”); 3.37 (“in” for “are”); 5.217 (“Cynique”); 5.751 (“his” for “this”); 7.43 (extra quotation mark); 7.388 (“b5” for “b6”); 7.439 (insufficient italics for the title of Aristocles’ work); 8.115 (“1982” for “1983”); 8.219 (missing period after “scil”); 8.284 (R24a should be simply “*Antid.* 268”); 8.385 (“situation”); 8.411 (“Chaerephon”).

trees-and-woods problem; with a single narrow column, poetic lines become jumbledly broken (e.g. Xenophanes D59–69 and the Derveni papyrus; Parmenides D4–14 and Empedocles to a lesser extent; the “Dramatic Appendix” in volume 9); the admittedly useful Chapter Outlines have a daunting formatting; and with eight additional volumes to keep track of, none with their authors marked on the spines, cross-referencing is for octopi. But even the challenges prompt salutary revelations: Why *should* we expect all pre-Platonic philosophical thinkers to fit in only one or two volumes? Why *not* include as many helpful sub-headings as possible? How *could* any of these authors be studied without studying all the others? Who knew there was so much material on Empedocles (5.317–733)? What use are those alchemical texts?

So much for the *realia*; now to some of the substantive scholarly strengths of the volumes. Laks’ and Most’s one-to-two page introductions to each author astounded me each time for their concision, insight, and generous negotiation of controversial issues. (They apply an equally wondrous succinctness, acuity, and judgment to their “Glossary” of Greek terms, 1.219–257.) They make intriguing new conjectures for a number of texts, notably the Derveni Papyrus and the three main works of Gorgias. They assemble a dazzlingly array of material from the otherwise penumbral regions of epic cosmogony, medical writings, and tragic and comic drama.³ They supply testimonia far beyond Diels-Kranz’s [DK] or Graham’s allotments, many from languages other than Greek or Latin. They translate into a generally pellucid, precise, and mostly consistent English; for some authors, such as Heraclitus, they go provocatively, and thus usefully, against the grain. And their taxonomic innovation, macro-organizing passages into “Person,” “Doctrines,” and “Reception” (rather than into “Testimonia,” “Fragments,” and “other”), then micro-organizing them thematically (not alphabetically or chronologically by source) ends up happily perspicuous.

And then there are the justifiable decisions that might win only mixed applause. Fragments come without quoted or paraphrased context unless that context counts itself as testimonia, in which case it is printed elsewhere in the volumes. Volume 8 includes fifty pages on “Sophists’ and ‘Sophistic’: Collective Representations and General Characterizations,” interesting enough but perhaps at the cost of authors excluded from *EGP* but found in DK. Volume 1 is exclusively prefatory, and might have been joined with Volume 2.

³ For example, chapters on doxography (ch. 1), cosmological reflection (2), human-divine relations (3), medicine (29), *PDerv* (30), representations of “Sophists” (42; much longer than DK 79), and comedy and tragedy (43).

EGP's most noticeable novelty in content, the inclusion of Socrates, involves putting him between Gorgias and Prodicus, in a volume called *Sophists: Part I*, which itself has a table of contents that prints THE 'SOPHISTS' (i.e., now with quotation marks). Naturally, Socrates looks more like Prodicus than Democritus, and Plato puts Socrates much more in conversation with the ilk of that volume than earlier volumes, and Laks and Most observe that "Sophists" often cared about natural and mathematical research, quite like the so-called philosophers, distinguishing themselves mainly as tuition-charging teachers and as concerned with language; but for Plato and, more importantly, Aristotle and later doxographers, Socrates gets naturalized rather into the philosophical trajectory, even if he deserves a sort of third category.

In sum, *EGP* is really exciting, a marvelous piece of editorial collaboration, a work with depth and density for many kinds of readers at many times, and a serious contribution to the public (and academic) appreciation of the first centuries of Greek philosophy, the subsequent millennium of uptake, and the past several centuries of textual work recovering it.

Lacunae

Laks and Most acknowledge that they omit the lesser(-known) figures found in DK, or subsume the relevant fragments to the sections of more important figures. As examples of excluded figures they give Cleidemus (DK 62) and Idaeus (DK 63).⁴ DK print six or seven references for the first, and some thirty-five lines for the second. (LM do include Xenias [DK 81] and Lycophron [DK 83], despite their having only four and seven entries, respectively.) Aristotle mentions both Cleidemus and Idaeus. Aristotle also mentions the LM-excluded Xuthus (DK 33), Phaleas (DK 39), Hippodamus (DK 39), and Cratylus (DK 65). Admittedly these, like many other figures, have only a few ancient references, hardly enough to build a personality or intellectual program, and thus hardly enough to warrant *EGP*-style dedicated chapters. But their inclusion in DK has the important function of showing that the origins of Greek philosophy comprises more than the names mentioned in Plato's dialogues and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* A.3–9; it reveals, as Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* α.1, that even if we care mostly about Timotheus, we should acknowledge the Phrynian who allowed Timotheus to be. A good example of a "Phrynian" *EGP*-excluded thinker is Thrasylalkes of Thasos (DK 35).

⁴ Cleidemus appears in two LM-printed passages from Theophrastus, *Sens.* 38 and *HP* 3.1.4.

DK print two citations, Strabo 1.29 and 17.790; he is a theorist of the Nile's flooding, and Poseidonius says Aristotle developed his view of winds. In *POxy* LXXII 3659, a comic text possibly from the fourth-century BCE (published in 1984), Thrasyalkes is said to disagree with other *philosophoi* about the color of silver, saying it is black; we find debates about the qualities of silver in Plato's *Phaedrus* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and debates about color in testimonia of Anaxagoras. I think a compromise solution would have been for Laks and Most to include, in Volume 1, a list of authors in DK but not in LM, and to give a brief report of the sort found in LM's "Index of Other Persons" (1.199–217).

Laks and Most also explicitly exclude those who, "however important as they might have been, do not seem to present an authentically philosophical profile," listing Theagenes (DK 8), Oenopides (DK 41), Damon (DK 37), Menestor (DK 32), Critias (DK 88), and Ion of Chios (DK 36). Strangely, given the importance of this exclusion and the title of this collection, Laks and Most never explain what "an authentically philosophical profile" would be, or why these authors get excluded but not the Sophists, medical writers, poets, and others. These authors are indisputably important for philosophy, whatever their profile. Theagenes' allegorization of Homer has been set at the discipline's origins.⁵ Oenopides gets linked with Anaxagoras in the Platonic dialogue about the meaning of *philosophia*, the *Rival Lovers* (132b1).⁶ Over the past decade Robert Wallace has shown Damon to be a key Athenian sophist.⁷ Laks and Most admit that Ion of Chios "apparently [wrote] a philosophical treatise" (1.210); he combines dramatic, belletristic, and philosophical literary production perhaps more than any fifth-century Athenian.⁸

A similar figure, Critias, comes up frequently in the passages cited throughout *EGP*, and is a major philosophical interlocutor for Plato's Socrates; his entry in the "Index of other persons" does not even mention that he was an intellectual and prolific author; Laks and Most could at least have referred to the fragments of Critias' printed in the Loeb *Greek Elegaic Poetry*.

⁵ E.g., Gerard Naddaf, "Allegory and the Origins of Philosophy," in W. Wians, *Logos and Muthos: Philosophical Essays in Greek Literature* (Albany, 2009), 99–131.

⁶ See István Bodnár, *Oenopides of Chios: A Survey of the Modern Literature with a Collection of the Ancient Testimonia* (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2007).

⁷ This culminated in his *Reconstructing Damon: Music, Wisdom Teaching, and Politics in Perikles' Athens* (Oxford, 2015).

⁸ See, recently, Han Baltussen "Playing the Pythagorean: Ion's Triagmos," in V. Jennings and A. Katsaros, *The World of Ion of Chios* (Leiden, 2007), 295–318.

Assorted Comments on the Volumes

Volume 2 includes a most instructive section on doxography and useful excerpts of poetic cosmological speculation. The section called “Reflections on Gods and Men” tucks the Seven Sages into T35–38; this limited publicity of the Sages surprised me, given the attention given to the Sophists in volume 8, and the likelihood of important conceptual links between *sophoi* and *philosophoi* (vis-à-vis Thales and Solon in particular), the frequent doxographical linkages between them, and the entire structure of Diogenes Laertius’ first book of *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. The Thales section, though much more compact than the recent Wörhle edition (translated into English in 2014), is correspondingly much more efficient and inexpensive.

Volume 3 includes Xenophanes and Heraclitus. Laks and Most put Heraclitus “toward the end of the sixth century” rather than into the first decades of the fifth century (as P1–2 might suggest). They give clever Kahnian punctuation to the first line of D1/B1 DK (“And of this account that is—always—humans are uncomprehending”) and to the last line of D26/B129 (“and after he made a selection of these writings he devised his own wisdom: much learning, evil artifice”). Boldly, they divide D114/112 into two separate fragments, attributing the *kai* following *megista* to Stobaeus. They settle on two “river” fragments as direct quotations (B49a and B12), but include Plato’s and Seneca’s versions as parallels. I already mentioned that there are numerous unexpected translations—I give only one example (which happens to be an unexplained inconsistency): *sôphronein* as “thinking with moderation” at D30/B116; “to be moderate” at D114/B112. LM also hesitate often to attribute words directly to Heraclitus (though not to the extent that Marcovich does); the harshest case is D40/B35, where they accept as secure only *historas* (as “investigators”), with a footnote that would be mysterious to most, providing no real reasons—Laks and Most, after all, show little skepticism about Clement’s other Heraclitus fragments. Indeed, this volume reveals the challenge in presenting a determinate text, even if not explicitly a definitive one, without detailed commentary on method and specific cases.

Volume 4, *Western Greek Thinkers: Part I*, comprises exclusively “Pythagoras and the Pythagorean School”; Laks and Most organize in a complex but effective way an even more complex set of data.

Volume 5 contains Parmenides, Zeno, and Melissus; an enormous section on Empedocles (with an argument for two poems, *Purifications* as the more important; see 5.317–19); and, under the rubric of “Philosophy and Medicine,”

Alcmaeon and Hippo. Laks and Most write that “although our basis for forming a judgment on him is very limited, it is quite possible that Hippo does not deserve Aristotle’s scathing condemnation of him; indeed, it is highly likely that it was Hippo’s doctrines that inspired Aristotle’s reconstruction of Thales’ possible arguments in favor of water as a principle” (5.772).

Volume 6 starts with Anaxagoras, Archelaus, and Diogenes of Apollonia (whose use of the word σοφιστάς in D1/A4 could probably be bolded as a direct quotation). Then it provides an impressive set of selections from Hippocratic writings. I found this highly instructive. Yet the previous point about Diogenes suggests that σοφισταί in *On Ancient Medicine* 20 [T7/31A71] might be translated not as “sophists [or: experts]” but as some equivalent of *phusiologoi* (which LM always give, with *phusikoi*, as “natural philosopher”). Further, the inclusion of a passage on blood vessels (T24 = Hipp. *Nat. hom.* 11) seemed rather far afield, and none of the three fragments classed under the heading *The Doctrine Called ‘Pangenesis’* (T26–T27) contained the word “pangenesis.” The volume ends with a user-friendly version of the Derveni papyrus.

Volume 7 comprises Leucippus and Democritus, and includes in italicized font many of the ethical fragments found in Stobaeus under the names “Democritus” and “Democrates.”

Volume 8 includes Protagoras, Gorgias, Socrates, Prodicus, Thrasymachus, and Hippias. The Protagoras section includes substantial sections from Plato’s *Theaetetus* and *Protagoras* (in an “appendix” to the “Doctrine” section), though not the speech on the relativity of goodness at *Prot.* 334a4–c7. *EGP* gives good section headings to Gorgias’ three extant long works. I shall say a bit more about the section on Socrates (8.293–411), given its novelty. Laks and Most might have mentioned, in their introductory remarks, that reconstructing Socrates could benefit from more than a study of Plato and Xenophon—indeed, even they often appeal to Aristotle and Cicero—for one might rely in particular on the testimony of the other first-generation Socratics.

Their reason for giving no examples of later reception, that it “is indistinguishable from a large part of later Greek philosophy,” seems inadequate (they give 150 pages to Empedocles’ reception). P5 (and probably P2) might be directly attributed to Aristoxenus, which would increase the credibility of Porphyry’s claims. The section on “Relations with Critias” might give Platonic evidence in addition to Philostratus’ remark. The section on “Physical appearance” should at least cross-reference the comic descriptions, on which even some first-generation Socratic writing seems to depend. The section on “His *daimonion*” gives only one

Platonic testimonium, which does not obviously override alternative interpretations.

The section heading "... or Was He Interested in Natural Philosophy Too?" strikes me as too vague. The section called "Refutation (*elenkhos*)" should include *Charmides* 166c–d. The section called "Obedience to the City's Laws" attributes the views of the "laws of Athens" (in the *Crito*) directly to Socrates, but this is interpretatively fraught. The philosophical "doctrines" attributed to Socrates by Laks' and Most's categories and testimonia include the following: a primary (or exclusive) interest in ethics; the search for definition; irony, a habit of non-answering, and self-ascription of ignorance; conscious conversational norms; "induction"; refutation; the concern to know and care for oneself; the equation of virtue and knowledge; curiosity about the teachability of virtue; belief in the unity of virtue; assertion of involuntariness of evil-doing and the impossibility of *akrasia*; an absolute prohibition on doing injustice; and a subtle political skepticism. Students of Socratica may enjoy deciding whether this adequately captures Socrates' philosophical relevance. In the Thrasymachus section, Laks and Most might have made clearer that the brief testimony of the Platonic *Clitophon* (R8; I think the dialogue deserves a "ps-?" rather than a "ps." and "Pseudo-") proves more than that Thrasymachus had "continuing attractiveness" but that he must have claimed to know what justice is and to be able to teach it. In the Hippias section, D10 (= Pl. *Hipp. mai.* 286a–b) could be treated as evidence for speeches he actually or characteristically gave, not just for his personality as "Arrogant Orator." D2 and D15 translate the same Greek in different ways.

Volume 9 includes Antiphon (Laks and Most unify him, then refer the reader to Loeb #308 for the judicial/political works), Lycophron, Xenias, Anonymous Iamblich, *Dissoi Logoi*, and then one section on collective representations of Sophists (the Aristotelian testimonia, R18–21, 34, might be too late to be totally helpful), and another on depictions of philosophy in Greek drama.

Conclusion

Howsoever some of the remarks above sound critical, their claims should be taken as largely trivial when compared to the excellence of these nine volumes. Admittedly, since these Loeb volumes lack commentaries and fully elaborated explanations of their editorial principles, those who deal with ancient philosophy professionally cannot rely on them alone. But they can rely on them for a lot of the work of teaching, writing, and thinking. This is due to the remarkable effort and

talent of Laks and Most. Of course, as a publishing venture, the Loeb Classical Library ought to be applauded. It makes me wish they would take on other such thematic sequences (as they have also done of the Hippocratic corpus). Of perhaps greatest value would be a version of Giannantoni's *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquae* (Napoli, 1990) akin to that which Laks and Most provided for Diels-Kranz.

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