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The Logical Order of Presocratic Chronology

The idea is to examine whether the emergence and first developments of the philosophical way of thinking in Archaic and High Classical Greece conform to a meaningful pattern or not. By “meaningful pattern” I mean an overarching scheme within which each one (or most) of the various philosophical accounts that were formulated in that period finds its natural position (as if in a Pherecydian “niche”). Such a natural position would then help better understand the inner logic of the respective account, and, of course, vice versa, the aggregate of the diverse “systems” that could be included without distortion in such an orderly overview would put substance into the grand, formal structure.

The undertaking, if results are positive, could have a mighty impact on our understanding of early philosophy. Equipped with such a pragmatic conception of orderly relationships among the Presocratic systems, and given their essentially systematic character in themselves (for they aimed to explain, at least in principle, everything in a coherent way and according to explicitly laid down principles, we can then attempt to fill up the missing parts from the transmitted several accounts. We will then have two instruments to guide us in such projections – the inner logic of the system and its position within the logical order of developments.

Admittedly, this endeavour, presupposes a more “organic” make up of both each Presocratic philosophy and of the nexus of their interrelationships than is currently considered permissible, although a change is gradually occurring in scholarly perceptions relative to such perspectives. The results to be attained will finally judge the issue.

I shall concentrate (among the various interconnected aspects of a Presocratic system) on the cosmogonical principle. What in each case is (are) the ontological first principle(s) and how reality is produced from, out or by, them, how in other words they account for the order of things, for the “Cosmos”.

The line of development that I shall consider is the traditional sequence, Ionian philosophy with the singularity of Anaximander – Pythagoreanism – Heracleitus – Parmenides – the group of atomistic theories, of an atomism primarily qualitative (Anaxagoras), quantitative (Atomism proper) or mixed (Empedocles).

The role of the “mixed theologies” (esp. of the Pherecydian and Orphic type) in the philosophical developments and vice versa will have to be tackled. This interaction and mutual feed back can best be understood precisely by means of common driving forces, and of a general meaningful pattern resulting through their working, in the intellectual dynamics of that exceedingly fertile age.

Account will be naturally taken of the ancient doxographical tradition on the matter, with its “Schools” and “Successions”.

As an example of the filling-in measured process that I mentioned above, my reconstruction of the operational philosophy in the Derveni papyrus text will provide a useful illustration.

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