An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy. JOHN MANSLEY ROBINSON. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968. x, 339 p. $4.25.

Robinson has set out to compose a history of early Greek philosophy "that would be useful to beginners" (vii), and he has brilliantly succeeded. For the purposes of an introductory course, this book is so far superior to its rivals that it is hard to imagine how a teacher who uses it once can prefer any other existing text. The style and organization of the book are clear and attractive, the scholarship is sound and up to date, the exposition of philosophic ideas is precise and coherent, the translations are always readable and on the whole reliable, and,

above all, the selection of material is much richer and more comprehensive than in any work of comparable size. Robinson begins with Hesiod instead of Thales, he quotes important passages from Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Herodotus in order to shed light on the conceptual background of early philosophic views, and he not only includes the Sophists and their contemporaries from the late fifth century but provides the proper intellectual context by ample quotations from Aristophanes' *Clouds,* Thucydides' *History,* and relevant passages in Plato. Although he does not include every fragment (as Burnet does, for example), I have noticed no decisive omissions; and what omissions he has made are amply compensated for by the abundance of material from the period of the Sophists, who are too often ignored or misinterpreted in histories of "pre-Socratic" philosophy.

Robinson wisely avoids the term 'pre-Socratic', as he avoids the confused perspective on which it rests. Indeed the term has no clear meaning, since it suggests no definite date. It cannot mean "before the *birth* of Socrates," since then it would exclude Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and the atomists. Could we take it to mean "before the *floruit* of Socrates," around 430 B.C.? But although there are important intellectual changes associated with this date (and with the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, the plague, the death of Pericles, etc.), there is no real connection with the influence of Socrates. And in any case it would be a mistake to separate Democritus and the Sophists from their Ionian and Italian predecessors. The proper terminal point for the early period, as Robinson recognizes, is the end of the fifth century, with the *death* of Socrates and the rise of post-Socratic literature. The most appropriate description for the period of philosophy covered here is 'pre-Platonic'. It is one of the merits of Robinson's work to have emphasized this unifying perspective in his preface and epilogue, where the continuity and contrast between Plato and the earlier philosophers is clearly stated.

The internal unity of the period is well brought out by Robinson's historical commentary, which presents the material as "the record of a concerted attempt to answer certain fundamental questions" (vi). The commentary is based upon a view (which this reviewer accepts) that, although some questions and conceptions are inherited by the philosophers from mythopoetic modes of thought as represented in Hesiod, the characteristic framework of Greek physical speculation was established for the first time in Miletus, above all by Anaximander; and that this framework was preserved, with new theoretical dimensions, after the ontological and epistemological critique of Parmenides.

Robinson shows more clearly than most scholars have done the close connections between Parmenides' *Doxa* and the new physical theories of Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and the atomists (e.g., 172). His account of Zeno is unusually good, drawing as it does upon the recent work of Gregory Vlastos. His presentation of Democritus' views on human life and happiness in chapter XI is likely to be illuminating even for specialists. And perhaps no general work has ever made so clear the striking parallels between the fifth-century views of Antiphon and the famous Nietzschean speech of Callicles in the *Gorgias* (250–255).

Every specialist will find something to criticize in a textbook in his field. Thus I find myself in disagreement with Robinson's presentation of Hesiod's *Theogony,* which leans too far in the direction of an "allegorical" reading of the poem in the style of Cornford, as if Hesiod were offering us physical speculation in disguised form. This leads to a blurring of the radical break between mythopoetic and properly cosmological modes of thought. Cosmology is an invention of Miletus. Thus the spherical Heaven in Robinson's diagram on page 10 may represent the view of Anaximander or Anaximenes, but certainly not that of Hesiod. And the interpretation of *chaos* as the gap "between earth and heaven" (5) is strictly incompatible with Hesiod's text, which insists that *chaos* came into being "first of all," *before* heaven and earth. Again, it is surprising to find Xenophanes—or any pagan of antiquity—described as a "strict monotheist." In order to defend this view (53). Robinson is obliged to empty the phrase "greatest among the gods and men" of its obvious meaning. And compare the passage quoted from Xenophanes on page 55: "to hold *the gods* in reverence" (my italics).

The chapter on Pythagoreanism, although sensitive and internally consistent, will be regarded by many scholars as largely anachronistic, relying as it does on Plato and later authors for the statement of views which are placed in the book before Heraclitus and Parmenides. Thus a Platonizing account of why we cannot hear the harmony of the spheres, because the ears of the soul are stopped with carnal obstructions and passions (which Robinson quotes from Shakespeare and Plutarch, 71 f.), can scarcely antedate the philosophical dualism of the *Phaedo.* And the "Pythagorean" mathematical proofs which Robinson reports from Eudemus and later authors may belong to the late fifth or early fourth century, but surely not to the time of Pythagoras, as the context would suggest. Robinson's insistence on treating Empedocles as a predecessor of Anaxagoras (151, 175) seems to me mistaken for reasons which I have stated elsewhere. And the account

that is offered for Empedocles' cosmic cycle, including a zoogony in two distinct periods, has been decisively refuted in several recent studies. (See the work of Solmsen, Hölscher, and Bollack, summarized in *Hermes,* 1968, 239 f.; and my remarks in *Gnomon* 1969, pp. 442–445. O'Brien's recent book, *Empedocles' Cosmic Cycle,* seems to be a rearguard action for a lost cause.)

These are inevitable and on the whole minor blemishes in a work that covers such a large field of controversial scholarship. More important, and perhaps more easily corrigible, are certain mechanical defects in translation and presentation of material. I have noted errors in the translation on page 81 (text 4.56), page 105 (text 5.92: Achilles in *Iliad* IX does not complain that his life would be "all too long"!), pages 108 f., 171, etc. In some cases the inaccuracy is crucial for the interpretation. Thus it is an incorrect view of Empedocles' cosmic cycle that is responsible for the rendering "During the reign of strife . . . during the reign of Love" on page 172, where the text of Empedocles has simply "in Strife . . . in Love." The valuable discussion of Antiphon in pages 251 ff. is also marred by an inaccurate translation (the text never speaks of "laws of nature," since the whole discussion turns on the opposition of *nomos* and *physis*) and by a curious omission. I can see no reason to abridge the extremely fragmentary remains of this argument by leaving out two sentences at the end of text 12.14. The omission is all the more regrettable since the sentences in question contain the most explicit statement of the hedonistic conception of self-interest which dominates the entire text and which reappears in the *Gorgias* in Callicles' praise of desires and their satisfaction.

Such defects are small matters in a textbook for an undergraduate course. They do suggest that the book cannot replace Burnet's classic *Early Greek Philosophy,* and more recent supplements such as Kirk and Raven or Guthrie, for the purposes of basic scholarship in the field. Such was not the author's intent. What he set out to do, he has done exceedingly well.

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