Rereading Ancient Philosophy

Old Chestnuts and Sacred Cows

Edited by Verity Harte and Raphael Woolf

REREADING ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

This book revisits, and sheds fresh light on, some key texts and debates in ancient philosophy. Its twin targets are 'old chestnuts' – well-known passages in the works of ancient philosophers about which one might have thought everything there is to say has already been said – and 'sacred cows' – views about what ancient philosophers thought, on issues of philosophical importance, that have attained the status of near-unquestioned orthodoxy. Thirteen leading scholars respond to these challenges by offering new perspectives on familiar material and challenging some prevailing orthodoxies. On authors ranging from the Presocratics to Plotinus, this book represents a snapshot of contemporary scholarship in ancient philosophy, and a vigorous and illuminating affirmation of its continuing interest and power. This volume is dedicated to Professor MM McCabe, an inspiring scholar and teacher, colleague and friend to both the editors and the contributors.

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MM McCabe

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This volume is a tribute to MM McCabe, devoted friend, inspirational teacher and colleague, and superlative scholar, with a gift for philosophical conversation beyond compare.

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Preface

In July 2014, twelve former students and colleagues of Mary Margaret McCabe gathered for a surprise 'live Festschrift' in her honour, held in the beautiful town of Figeac, in the Lot in Southwest France. They were Peter Adamson, Joachim Aufderheide, Tad Brennan, Charles Brittain, Amber Carpenter, Verity Harte, Angela Hobbs, Fiona Leigh, Nicole Ooms, Ricardo Salles, Sir Richard Sorabji and Raphael Woolf. The theme of the Figeac Festschrift, as of this volume, was Old Chestnuts and Sacred Cows. We are delighted to include as chapters in this volume many papers that were offered as talks in Figeac and to add contributions from three other scholars: former student Dominic Scott, former colleague Shaul Tor, and former teacher and colleague Malcolm Schofield. It is with enormous pleasure that we present this volume to MM.

Maintaining secrecy regarding a five-day international event requires quite the conspiracy. We would like to thank our co-conspirators, Martin Beddoe, Iain Petrie and Margaret Whittaker, for their tactical support in putting the event on and pulling off the surprise, the participants in Figeac for their self-discipline in maintaining radio silence and the contributors to this volume for keeping its existence in turn secret until the eleventh hour. Last, but not least, we thank MM herself, who, in addition to her many other virtues, is the most wonderfully appreciative person to surprise in this way and who is the inspiration for it all.

Additional thanks are due to Michael Sharp, who has been indefatigable in his support and encouragement of the volume; two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press; Allison Piñeros Glasscock, for editorial assistance with the volume and preparation of its bibliographies and indices; to Jane Dixon for pointing us to the Franz Marc image that graces the cover of our volume and to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for permission to use it.

Introduction

Verity Harte and Raphael Woolf

Many of us privileged to study and teach ancient philosophy for a living will at some point have encountered, within or outside the academic environment, an interlocutor who asks, often in incredulous tones, some form of the following question: how do you find anything new to say about material that is so old?

Now there are various replies one could give. One might, for example, mutter words to the effect that the study of ancient philosophy did not really take off as an academic subject until the work of nineteenth-century German philologists, and that the discipline is therefore rather 'younger' than it may seem. But if a response of this sort does not strike our interlocutor, or even us, as particularly compelling – after all, that surely leaves considerably more than a century for scholars to have delivered the goods! – that may be because of a nagging suspicion that the questioner is onto something. Certainly, when it comes to the foremost philosophical figures of the ancient world, Plato and Aristotle, though not only to them, it can sometimes be hard to resist the thought that, just maybe, everything that might usefully be said about their work has already been uttered.

The present volume is intended as an antidote to that pessimistic thought. It seeks to address the idea that when dealing with at least some of the best-known works, authors or schools in the ancient philosophical tradition, we are inevitably faced at times with texts that have previously been mined by scholars with great thoroughness and skill. But it does so by embracing, rather than despairing at, that state of affairs. Its collective response to our sceptical interlocutor is that, when looked at with fresh eyes, the most well-worn texts can yield new insights, and the hoariest received opinions about them can prove to be less of a solid edifice than may appear.

No doubt much of contemporary scholarship on ancient philosophy can be read, at least implicitly, as joining in with such a response. The distinctiveness of this volume is that it aspires to do so in an explicit and

self-conscious way. It identifies two particular categories – the 'old chestnut' and the 'sacred cow' – that may be taken to encapsulate the potential problem of reading texts that have long been the subject of scholarly scrutiny, and encourages contributors to select examples of such categories, reflect on them, and, we hope, demonstrate in practice how fruitful it can be to engage with ancient philosophy under those headings.

To elaborate a little, then, on our two main categories: 'old chestnuts' are pieces of ancient philosophical text that, for the most part, have received a large and sustained amount of scholarly attention, been subject to a number of competing (sometimes fiercely debated) readings, but are now at a stage where debate seems to be flagging, if not exhausted: Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*, to take a text covered (from different viewpoints) by two of the papers in this volume, may serve as an example.

'Sacred cows', on the other hand, are not specific texts, but views about what some ancient school or thinker may have held on a question of philosophical importance – views which have come to be sufficiently entrenched as to represent something like an orthodoxy and to be taken to be so obvious as to need no argument: 'Plato's Socrates was a eudaimonist' would be an example, again taken from this volume. What the different categories of old chestnut and sacred cow are in danger of sharing is the supposition that, for significant portions of the ancient philosophical corpus, the wellsprings of interpretation may be close to running dry.

Based (with some additions) on a conference held in July 2014 in Figeac (France) in honour of Professor Mary Margaret McCabe, this volume begs to differ. One of its major inspirations is the work of McCabe, Emeritus Professor of Ancient Philosophy at King's College London, Fellow of the British Academy, 2014–17 Keeling Scholar-in-Residence at UCL, and the 2016–17 Sather Professor at Berkeley (the first female scholar of ancient philosophy to be appointed to that office). Known to all with more than a passing acquaintance with her as 'MM', her influence permeates each of this volume's contributions, exerted not just by means of her powerful and original publications on ancient philosophy,[1] but also through her gifts as teacher and discussant.

Her published work, to be sure, sets the standard for the bold revisiting of familiar texts. To take an example, McCabe's paper 'Escaping One's

[1] For a comprehensive bibliography of her published work to date, see the *Mary Margaret McCabe Bibliography* in this volume.

Own Notice Knowing: Meno's Paradox Again'[2] begins its interpretation of Meno's Paradox (an old chestnut if ever there was one) by asking whether one 'should apologize for coming back yet again . . . to Meno's paradox.'[3] McCabe offers due homage to two of the paradox's most stalwart recent interpreters – Gail Fine and Dominic Scott (a contributor to this volume) – before succinctly indicating what she still finds unsatisfying about their readings, and going on to offer her own distinctive and persuasive interpretation of that much analysed passage.

This is not the place to dwell on the details of that interpretation. Instead let us return to McCabe's question about whether apology is needed for returning to a particular old chestnut, and fill in the ellipsis. McCabe speaks of coming back to the paradox as 'to something that has puzzled me for forty years';[4] and in this phrase one hears something of what, for those of us fortunate enough to have had philosophical conversations with MM over an extended period of time, makes her approach to philosophy, and to the ancients' way of doing philosophy, such a rewarding and invigorating one. MM has the Socratic knack not just of feeling the force of a philosophical puzzle herself, but of being able to communicate its force to others, in such a way as to implant the idea that nothing could be more urgent, here and now, than trying to get to the bottom of it.

It is this aspect of MM's relation with philosophy – of being constantly open to philosophical puzzlement, however venerable the puzzles may be, and of helping others to be so too – that gives this volume an indispensable part of its orientation. About any substantial piece of philosophy, there is always something fresh to say, because it is always possible to feel the problems afresh, and by doing so on one's own terms, to seek new ways of understanding them: a lesson that has been put into practice for some years now in the King's College London 'Old Chestnuts' seminar, initiated by MM and Verity Harte in 2000 and still running today as a graduate ancient philosophy summer seminar. We here pay tribute to its participants, past and present, for helping continue to infuse the old chestnuts concept with ever new and unexpected flavours.

MM's gift for communicating philosophical ideas, and for enabling others to think them through for themselves, is related to the view – one that she strongly holds and whose credentials in ancient philosophy hardly need stating – that philosophy at its best is carried out through the medium of dialogue and conversation. This is no mere slogan. As her recently published collection, *Platonic Conversations*,[5] amply attests, seeing ancient

[2] McCabe 2009. [3] McCabe 2009: 233. [4] McCabe 2009: 233. [5] McCabe 2015.

philosophical authors as engaged in dialogue – direct or indirect – with their readers, with themselves and with one another, offers tremendous scope for enhancing our understanding of many difficult passages. Prominent here is the thesis that much light is to be shed on Aristotle if we regard him as being in more or less continuous dialogue with Plato, not just with general aspects of Plato's thought (as all might agree) but closely and sensitively with individual passages of his work, a thesis corroborated by McCabe with reference to some choice Aristotelian chestnuts such as *De Anima* 3.2[6] and *Metaphysics* 7.13–16.[7]

MM's output is not confined, however, to Plato and Aristotle. She has done pioneering work in elucidating the structure of Presocratic thought and has also made significant contributions to the study of Hellenistic philosophy. This volume reflects that breadth of interest. While the majority of papers are on Plato, who represents – via several books and numerous articles – the largest component of MM's scholarly production, philosophers discussed in the following pages range widely, from Heraclitus to the Stoics to Plotinus. What the papers presented here have in common is the aim of stimulating, by example, new thinking about texts and ideas whose very status as old chestnuts or sacred cows is evidence, as we believe this volume's contents will confirm, of their continuing ability to puzzle and provoke.

While philosophers of the archaic period have left us plenty of chestnuts, none is so obviously fruitful in this regard as the provocateur Heraclitus. Shaul Tor (Chapter 1) opens our collection with a focus on Heraclitus B123 ('nature likes to hide'), whose very translation, tellingly, is up for dispute. Arguing against recent rejections of the personifying force of the verb *philein* (as 'to like' or 'to love'), he detects therein the influence of a sacred cow, itself fostered by Heraclitus' ancient readers. Heraclitus' nod to the intentional forces at work in nature, reflected and reinforced for the reader who comes back to B123 from other Heraclitean fragments, sits ill with an influential narrative, originating with passages of Plato and Aristotle, which finds their predecessors engaged in a pre-Weberian 'disenchantment' of the world.

Aristotle and, above all, Plato are, of course, the principal purveyors in the ancient philosophy chestnut business, also thereby providing interpretive fuel for many sacred cows. Thus, it is no surprise that the remaining

[6] '"Perceiving that We See and Hear": Aristotle on Plato on Judgement and Reflection', Chapter 14 of McCabe 2015.

[7] 'Some Conversations with Plato: Aristotle *Metaphysics* Z.13–16', Chapter 15 of McCabe 2015.

papers in our volume are focused on the writings and thought of these two, in particular Plato; and that this is so even when our authors take up responses to them in the work of later authors. Six contributors take on a Platonic old chestnut directly, adopting different strategies for striking at it. Charles Brittain (Chapter 2) focuses on exposing the precise structure of Socrates' parodic interpretation of Simonides' *Ode to Scopas* in the *Protagoras*, arguing that Plato has Socrates play a skilful game exploiting late fifth-century interpretative gambits collected in *Poetics* 25, while offering, through his Socrates' misadventures, the makings of a positive Platonic theory of interpretation. An upshot of this reading is defence of the heretical view that Plato's Socrates is not always averse to the deliberate use of fallacy in constructing his arguments.

Raphael Woolf and Angela Hobbs (Chapters 4 and 5, respectively) each take a swing at the speech of Diotima in the *Symposium*. Woolf picks up the famous objection by Gregory Vlastos that the speech does not properly value the role of the individual in interpersonal love. Holding, against recent detractors, that Vlastos's charge was not misplaced he argues that it has nevertheless been misdiagnosed and that, with its proper basis in mind, we should not simply dismiss Diotima's position. Where Woolf opts for a strike on an already notorious feature of Diotima's famous speech, Hobbs argues that, even in a hoary old nut of this kind, there are new veins to be mined, often obscured by contemporary prejudices. Such, she argues, is the claim that *Erōs* is a *daimōn*, some kind of magical figure (in the non-debunking sense), with the corollary implications for Socrates, insofar as Diotima's description of *Erōs* is widely recognized as featuring traits resonant of Socrates. The idea of a magical aspect to Socrates, and to the philosophy he represents, should not, she insists, be dismissed or downplayed because of the negative associations that magic also has elsewhere in Plato. Instead, an understanding of magic as radically transformative can explain both its Platonic use and its connotations therein for bad and good.

Verity Harte and Dominic Scott (Chapters 7 and 8) both come at chestnuts, in the fertile branches of the *Republic*, that involve the distinction between knowledge and (true) belief. Each takes aim by arguing that the nut is best attacked with the aid of passages from elsewhere in the work. Harte argues that material on powers hidden in the conversation between Socrates and Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1 sheds light on the individuation conditions for powers subsequently exploited in the famous argument to distinguish philosophers from 'philodoxers' at the end of *Republic* 5. Scott argues that when, in *Republic* 10's discussion of mimetic poetry, Socrates descends from the apparently heady metaphysics of his opening discussion

to a more workaday view of knowledge drawn from 'experience' (*empeiria*) and thence to an opaque contrast between the knowledge of users and the true belief of makers, not only is this not inconsistent with the rest of the work, but its consistency, both in its local context and in the work as a whole, comes into focus through careful attention to the work's recurring double focus on the situation of legislators both actual and ideal.

Typically, a Platonic old chestnut will be a specific passage of a work. Sometimes, however, a work as a whole is so puzzling in its overall construction that it constitutes a chestnut in itself. Such is the situation of the *Cratylus*, Malcolm Schofield's target (Chapter 9). The *Cratylus* is famous for the worry that a perfect image of Cratylus would be another Cratylus. Schofield argues that the dialogue presents us with a puzzle in its own two portraits of Cratylus: an enigmatic figure at its opening, whose views are its stimulant, but who is silent for the bulk of the dialogue, only to emerge a regular discussant at its close. The solution, Schofield argues, and an insight into the project of the dialogue as a whole, is to see that Cratylus, reportedly a teacher of Plato, is used as a figure to enable the working through of some of the deepest paradoxes that Plato sees as arising from contemporary naturalist theories of naming.

Three further contributors, Amber Carpenter (Chapter 3), Tad Brennan (Chapter 6) and Joachim Aufderheide (Chapter 10), tackle passages with old chestnut status, two Platonic, one Aristotelian: Socrates' argument in the *Gorgias* that the tyrant who does what he wants is not thereby powerful or happy; the proposals regarding women as guardians in *Republic* 5, the first of the three waves that Socrates is there faced with; and Aristotle's definition of virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6. Each, however, aims thereby to bring down a sacred cow. Carpenter argues that the orthodox view that Socrates is a eudaimonist misses the way in which, both in this argument and elsewhere, he carefully distinguishes the (human) good from happiness and uses constraints on the former to undermine conventions regarding the latter: Socrates should thus be more correctly regarded as an 'agathist' than a eudaimonist. Brennan argues that not only are Socrates' (and Plato's) attitudes to women consistent, they can be used to critique the conventional wisdom that, in the central books of the *Republic*, Plato sets to one side the work's governing city-soul analogy. The endorsement of the selection of *some* women against the backdrop of a general anti-feminist stance towards women is a figure for the rational selection of some pleasures against the backdrop of rational suppression of the majority of appetites. Aufderheide argues that a careful scrutiny of Aristotle's definition of virtue, in conjunction with his account of the good person as a

measure (*EN* 3.4), shows that Aristotle does not accord virtue priority in definition over right action. Accordingly, despite the obvious centrality of virtue to his ethical theory, Aristotle was no virtue ethicist: proponents of twentieth- and twenty-first-century virtue ethics, taken as defenders of a distinct normative theory, are wrong to revere Aristotle as its founder.

Three final contributors remind us that ancient readers of Plato and Aristotle (and others) had their chestnuts too: some still in fruit, others that have receded from view. Ricardo Salles (Chapter 11) argues that the harmony theory of soul in Plato's *Phaedo*, a recurring old chestnut, had a decisive influence on the Stoic theory of soul as *pneuma* tensed in a particular way. In turn, tracing the contours of the Stoic reading of the passage and their parallel theory brings out what is distinctive of the *Phaedo* theory as compared with apparently similar accounts of material powers in the *Timaeus*. In the background of Richard Sorabji's contribution (Chapter 12) are two Aristotelian chestnuts, the famous Sea Battle argument of *De Interpretatione* 9 and his theory of causes succinctly presented in *Physics* 2.3, in particular the way they figure, in later ancient authors, as a backdrop of perennial arguments about the requirements for actions being 'up to us' and thus morally accountable. Sorabji argues that the great second-century (AD) Aristotelian, Alexander of Aphrodisias, can be rescued from a current consensus as to the nature (and weakness) of his response to the Stoics, by recognition that his argumentative focus is on denying necessitation, right up to the moment of action, not causation and that he does not suppose that the cause must be divorced from the agent's beliefs, desires or in general their character.

Peter Adamson (Chapter 13) concludes our collection with an account of how Plotinus aims to crack one aspect of a truly old, old chestnut, much chewed over by late ancient Platonists, the Myth of Er: specifically the role it accords to a *daimōn* in connection with each human life. Showing the careful way in which Plotinus makes sense of the relations between three apparently inconsistent passages on a human's *daimōn*, from the *Republic*'s myth, the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*, Adamson offers a case study of Plotinus 'reading Plato from Plato' in *Enneads* 3.4 [15]. Plotinus emerges not only more cautiously optimistic about the prospects for human development than other, Gnostically inclined late ancient Platonists, but also as a non-dogmatic and subtle interpreter of Plato whose reading of his own and our old chestnuts still deserves serious attention: a fitting paradigm, we hope, with which to end the volume.

CHAPTER 1

On Second Thoughts, Does Nature Like to Hide?
Heraclitus B123 Reconsidered

Shaul Tor

1 Introduction

MM McCabe opens her recent collection of essays, *Platonic Conversations*, by arguing that Heraclitus' sayings have a way of implicating their reader in a kind of evolving conversational process. A Heraclitean statement provokes a puzzle and a first response as well as reflection on the puzzle, on the response and on the nature of this dialectical exchange itself. This process recurs repeatedly with other Heraclitean sayings. And when we return to that initial saying in light of all these encounters with Heraclitus' texts and the subsequent reflection which they have provoked, then – despite what we might read in the *Phaedrus* – the same written words, repeated, may no longer be telling us the same thing in the same way. We will consider this dynamic of reading and rereading, of thinking and rethinking, in relation to Heraclitus' puzzling and provocative statement: φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ (DK22 B123).[1]

I provisionally translate: 'nature likes to hide.' This traditional rendering has come under stimulating criticism by Daniel Graham. In his paper 'Does Nature Love to Hide? Heraclitus B123' (2003), Graham surveys near-contemporary uses of the construction *philein* + infinitive. He argues that this construction never has a personalising force: '*there is not a single documented case in which* φιλεῖν + *infinitive means "loves to" in ancient*

As anyone with experience of this will know, a philosophy seminar that has MM McCabe in it is nothing like a philosophy seminar that does not have MM McCabe in it. Being MM's colleague in KCL was an exhilarating intellectual experience, and it is a pleasure to offer to this volume something on Heraclitus – a thinker about whom I learned a great deal from speaking with as well as reading MM.

[1] See Mackenzie 1988 (=McCabe 2015: 36–54) for a sustained analysis of Heraclitean paradoxes along these lines. While McCabe is preoccupied in particular with the logic of opposition, unity, contradiction and qualification in Heraclitus, whereas my own focus here will be on other (but related) aspects of his thought, similar questions will recur concerning the ways in which Heraclitus' sayings provoke, orient and frame philosophical reflection. Kahn 1979 throughout emphasises and demonstrates that our understanding of a single Heraclitean fragment may be altered and enriched in light of our growing awareness of, and reflection on, other Heraclitean sayings in relation to which that fragment may be read and *re*read (what he calls 'resonance', 1979: 89–90).

Greek.'[2] He maintains that, in the context of this construction, the verb *philein* always carries a different, non-personalising sense, merely indicating, with the infinitive, some regular pattern of action or events or some general truth. This leads Graham to the strong conclusion that 'we are not justified in positing the idiom [sc. "loves to"] as even a secondary meaning for the Greek phrase.'[3] Graham thus rejects what he describes as the traditional, literal translation.[4] He initially renders 'nature hides'. Arguing further, however, that his analysis of *philei* has removed any reason for thinking of this hiding as an action performed by a personified nature, he suggests – despite the fact that *phusis* is a noun in the nominative case and *philei* an active verb – the renderings 'nature is hidden' or 'nature is ever hidden'.[5]

If any ancient philosopher systematically generates hard chestnuts, which perpetually demand and reward fresh questions and new answers even when it appears that all that could be asked and said has been, then Heraclitus does so. Although B123 is undoubtedly one of Heraclitus' most celebrated and oft-quoted pronouncements, I want to suggest that Graham's argument sharpens a question which has been rather overlooked in discussions and uses of the fragment and which merits a fresh examination of this very familiar slogan. What *is* the meaning and philosophical upshot of speaking about nature in terms of the vocabulary of *philein*? I will argue that pursuing this question should lead us to a new understanding concerning the theological undertones of B123. In particular, it should lead us to a new recognition of the insight which the fragment affords into the relation between (the study of) nature and (the study of) god in Heraclitus' thought.

In one sense, then, what follows will be an inquiry into the old, small and exercising chestnut which makes up B123. But this inquiry will also tie into,

[2] Graham 2003: 178 (his emphasis). [3] Graham 2003: 178.

[4] Graham 2003: 175. There is a conceptual tension in Graham both (i) taking himself to be arguing against a literal translation and (ii) arguing that, in the *philein* + infinitive construction, the verb never means 'loves to' but has a different, non-personalising sense. If (ii) is right, then the traditional translation would not be overly literal but semantically incorrect.

[5] In Graham 2010: 161, we find: 'a nature is hidden'. Graham 2003: 178 renders B87 as 'a foolish man generally gets excited (ἐπτοῆσθαι φιλεῖ) at every report.' Hadot 2006: 7 allows the translation 'loves' but interprets B123 similarly: '[h]ere, the word "loves" (*philei*) denotes not a feeling but a natural or habitual tendency, or a process that occurs necessarily or frequently.' Hülsz (2013a: 185 and 2013b: 288 with n. 23) follows Graham, describing his argument as conclusive; Hülsz renders: 'nature is wont to be hidden.' Most 2016: 120 refers to Graham sympathetically but noncommittally for the view that *philei* in B123 need have no affective connotation; he renders: 'a nature tends to hide.' Mouraviev 2006: 140 briefly and tentatively questions Graham's philological claims and inferences, observing that Heraclitus B87 and Democritus B228 (addressed below) offer two possible counterexamples.

and confront us with, something of a Presocratic sacred cow. Graham is eager to emphasise that his analysis of B123 yields the result that here – in one of the first and most momentous philosophical occurrences of the term *phusis* – nature is categorically not figured as an agent nor personified as something which is in any way volitionally or consciously involved in effecting its own concealed nature. In doing so, Graham gives voice to a long tradition, which goes back to certain canonical accounts in Plato and Aristotle of the early natural philosophers, accounts which represent these thinkers as engaged in producing mechanistic and non-teleological patterns of explanation. This perception of the 'Presocratics' has played a formative role in the development of modern attitudes towards early Greek philosophy of nature. So too has the related notion that, in their pioneering strides in speculation and argumentation about the natural world, these philosophers rendered theology a subordinate aspect of natural philosophy ('natural theology') and retained only a radically depersonalised and naturalised notion of god. Now, to be sure, it is not the case that Presocratic scholarship exhibits consensus concerning these issues (we will have occasion below to note different voices pulling in different directions). Nonetheless, Plato's and Aristotle's representations of their predecessors continue to cast a long shadow. The deep-seated idea that, in moving away from mythological accounts of the world, the early philosophers of nature broke radically with an older notion that the study of nature is the study of divine persons remains pervasive and is regularly taken for granted. This sacred cow can still be heard lowing vigorously, and Graham's argument concerning B123 serves to save its hide from any possible *prima facie* contrary reading of the fragment.

This chapter, then, will both reconsider B123 itself in a new light and, consequently, suggest that the language of this particular fragment offers us one powerful and overlooked perspective from which to examine critically certain expectations that are deep-seated and still rife concerning the scope and orientation of early Greek inquiry into nature.

In the first half of the chapter, I re-evaluate some instructive uses of the construction *philein* + infinitive, particularly in Herodotus who, as Kahn observes, offers the earliest available corpus of (Ionic) prose after Heraclitus and is our most important guide for the (especially linguistic and conceptual) expectations of Heraclitus' audience.[6] In the second half, I return to B123 in light of this survey. I conclude by noting briefly how this analysis of B123 ties the fragment, as one striking test case, to the larger question of the scope and orientation of early Greek inquiries into god and nature and

[6] Kahn 1979: 92; cf. Graham 2003: 175–6.

how it underscores the importance of approaching these inquiries through a critical dialogue with the canonical accounts of the first Greek philosophers of nature in Plato and Aristotle.

What, then, is the significance of *philei* in B123? What sort of volitional and deliberate agency, if any, does it suggest? The upshot of our consideration of uses of the construction outside Heraclitus will be that, for the first-time reader or auditor of B123, these would be evocative, open and far from obvious questions. In the context of Heraclitus' work, however, the other reflections which surround B123 subsequently inform and constrain these questions. A reader who comes back again (and again) to this statement in light of Heraclitus' other fragments – in particular, his thoughts elsewhere on god and nature and his attitudes to language and interpretation – can be attuned to the insight which a personal reading affords into the intentionality, purposeful action and intelligence that determine nature's organisation and appearance.[7]

2 The Construction *Philein* + Infinitive

To begin with, Graham poses the philological question too narrowly by looking exclusively at occurrences of *philein* within the context of the construction *philein* + infinitive. We should start by stressing the rudimentary but important point that uses of *philein* outside of this construction commonly and unmistakably ascribe to the subjects of the verb personal affective and preferential attitudes.[8] The verb standardly signifies anything from love or an affectionate regard for something or someone to, more broadly, having a positive, approving or otherwise favourable attitude towards something or someone.[9] ('Loves' or 'likes', then, are not the only translations available in B123. We might alternatively render, for example: 'nature is minded to hide.' At any rate, the verb frequently indicates broadly the state of being positively and favourably disposed towards

[7] I will not make any assumptions about the ordering of the fragments. The question will be how we may encounter B123 in a hypothetical initial reading, and then how we may return to it in light of the other reflections which surround it. The appropriate structural image for relating Heraclitus' fragments to each other is the circle in whose circumference the starting point and the end point are common (B103).

[8] I make no claims here about the 'original' or 'basic' meaning of this vocabulary. I am only marking the most common and standard ways in which we find it deployed in extant archaic and classical sources.

[9] See LSJ, sv. φιλέω for numerous attestations from a wide array of genres and periods. From here the verb naturally extends to the results and outward manifestations of such affective states, e.g. 'to entertain as guest', 'to have intercourse', 'to kiss'.

something.) The verb in these senses is directed towards a seemingly unrestricted range of objects, including both persons and abstract or inanimate things. Notably, the term *philein* and its cognates are very commonly used with this sort of force to navigate the theological issue of what or whom the gods love and do not love. We standardly encounter evaluations of particular mortals as 'dear' to the gods.[10] The same language is used to indicate that a certain turn of events or state of affairs is in line with divine volition,[11] that certain mortal actions meet with divine approval or disapproval,[12] or that a deity is itself positively and naturally disposed towards engaging in some action.[13] In one distinct usage, this terminology expresses uncertainty or anxiety over whether a particular appellation will meet with divine favour or disfavour.[14]

The verb *philein*, in short, is ubiquitous outside the context of the construction *philein* + infinitive, and it is regularly a personalising verb. It ascribes to the subject of the verb (frequently – in a distinctive set of theological applications – gods or a god[15]) an affective and preferential attitude towards something. In doing so, the verb itself, if taken at face value, implies that its subject is the sort of thing to have such attitudes. Now, it does not follow that every occurrence of the verb (even outside the construction *philein* + infinitive) encourages us to adopt a reified and personal conception of the syntactical subject as, in fact, an agent that is characterised by attitudes of this sort. It is a consequential point, which we should accept from Graham's analysis, that near-contemporary readers of Ionic prose will indeed have been regularly exposed to uses of the construction which arguably invite a depersonalising interpretative response.

[10] As in the term θεοφιλής, e.g. Hdt. 1.87 (καὶ θεοφιλὴς καὶ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός) and Democr. B217; cf. e.g. Pl. *Lg*. 716c–d. Similarly in poetry: φιλεῖ δέ ἑ μητίετα Ζεύς, *Il.* 2.197; cf. e.g. *Il.* 2.668–9, 9.117, 16.94, 18.117–18 and 20.347; *Od.*15.245–6; A. *Pr.* 304; Hdt. 1.65; 7.148 (in the context of Delphic oracles); B. *Ep*. 4.1–2; 11.60.

[11] As in Hdt. 1.87 (negatively): ἀλλὰ ταῦτα δαίμοσί κου φίλον ἦν οὕτω γενέσθαι. Cf. e.g. *Il.* 9.23; *Od.* 7.316; Hdt. 2.64; Eur. *Ion* 14; Pl. *Ap*. 19a.

[12] As in *Od.* 14.83: οὐ μὲν σχέτλια ἔργα θεοὶ μάκαρες φιλέουσιν. Cf. e.g. Aeschylus, *Pr.* 660. The term *philein* and its cognates frame the exposition and critique in Plato's *Euthyphro* (6e10–11b5) of Euthyphro's successive candidate definitions of piety as what the gods love and what all the gods love.

[13] Ἑρμεία, σοὶ γάρ τε μάλιστά γε φίλτατόν ἐστιν ἀνδρὶ ἑταιρίσσαι, *Il.* 24.334–5; cf. e.g. *Il.* 1.541–2. This construction seems to be a periphrastic version of the construction *philein* + infinitive. It uses an adjective to govern the infinitive, with the same result of articulating a regular pattern of behaviour or action.

[14] E.g. A. *A*. 161; Pl. *Phlb*. 12c3–4; cf. Heraclit. B32, using another volitional term (οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει). On this theological issue, both in Heraclitus and elsewhere, see Rowett 2013.

[15] To clarify my position in response to a query from an anonymous reader: I am not suggesting that this vocabulary is *more commonly* used in theological than in other contexts, but only that we encounter in our sources a set of theological applications which is both distinctive and widespread.

Put differently, they will have been accustomed to the thought that, in uses of the construction, the author may not be inviting us to take at face value or to place any weight on the typical personalising connotations for the verb. We will also see, however, that it is a far less clear-cut and straightforward matter than Graham suggests what role the personal force of the verb can play within the construction *philein* + infinitive. Various applications of it can be seen to evoke, directly or indirectly (or even playfully), certain affective and volitional dispositions, on the part either of the syntactic subject itself or of some further implicit agency which underpins the regular pattern in question. Most importantly, nothing in the typical use of the construction requires us to posit that the verb *philein* is used here with some special (depersonalised) semantic *sense*, distinct from the (personalising) meaning of the verb elsewhere.[16] This means that the possibility of taking the personifying force of *philein* seriously (the possibility of taking the author at his word, as it were) is always there. In some especially instructive cases, notably pertaining to the nature and disposition of god, we can see this possibility activated through the context in which the construction *philein* + infinitive is configured.

But let us begin with Graham's first example. When explaining why no breezes blow from the Nile, Herodotus states: 'a breeze likes to blow (*phileei pneein*) from something cold' (Hdt. 2.27). Does this expression personify the breeze? If taken at face value, it does. It figures it as an agent that possesses the sort of conscious, affective states which the verb *philein* conveys. Now, it may seem obvious that here at least we can easily strip away the meteorological point from the personification. Recognising the standard affective and volitional force of the verb elsewhere, we might say that, here, Herodotus is merely indicating a certain pattern of events by speaking of breezes *as though* they liked to blow only from cold places. This response may appear less self-evident against a backdrop in which winds and breezes are standardly gods and the recipients of cults and prayers.[17] Nonetheless, Herodotus, by reflecting on the inherent implausibility and inappropriateness of the idea that anything could blow from warm places (*ouk oikos*), and by underscoring the unchanging stability of this general rule (*tauta . . . egeneto*), is arguably moving away from a notion of winds as agents who may alter their conduct on a whim or in response to a prayer. But Herodotus' statement that these traditional divinities 'like' to act in a

[16] This is particularly evident in Hdt. 7.50 (cited below), where the two volitional terms, *phileei* and *ethelei*, are used as functional equivalents.

[17] E.g. *Od*. 4.565–68; Hes. *Th*. 869–80; A. *Pr*. 88–91, 132; Hdt. 7.189. On the cults of winds, see further Burkert 1985: 175.

certain way – especially if we bear in mind the familiar use of the language of *philein* and its cognates to speak of divine dispositions and inclinations – still plausibly points towards that general divine guidance which in fact deliberately and intelligently determines this and all other such aspects of the ordered world as they are and should be. In fact, Herodotus elsewhere both explicates the natural mechanisms which facilitate another such feature of the ordered world (that timid and edible animals reproduce more easily than fierce and hardy ones) and explicitly traces it to god's wise providence (*tou theiou hē pronoiē . . . eousa sophē*), which *itself* orders the world as is plausible and appropriate (*hōsper kai oikos esti*, Hdt. 3.108). Herodotus' attitude to these regularities, then, recalls that of Ionian thinkers like Anaximander and Xenophanes, who offer similar explanations of such natural phenomena in natural terms (for example, on winds: Anaximand. A11.7; Xenoph. B30) but inscribe all such processes within a general framework of divine guidance and governance (Anaximand. A15; Xenoph. B25).

A similar suggestion can be made for the aphorisms which pertain to success and failure in human endeavours, such as: 'rewards, then, generally like to come about for those who have the will to act (*toisi . . . phileei ginesthai ta kerdea*), whereas to those who think over everything and hesitate they do not at all wish to come about' (*toisi de . . . ou mala ethelei*, Hdt. 7.50; cf. e.g. Hdt. 7.10.6, 7.9.3). Again, arguably nothing else in this passage suggests a reified and personified conception of the syntactic subject itself ('rewards'). And yet, this volitional language (*phileei . . . ethelei*) is highly evocative in a textual and cultural context constantly preoccupied with questions about whether and in what ways divine agency, divine favour and divine interventions govern and at least co-determine the vicissitudes and outcomes of human endeavours.[18] A striking confirmation of this suggestion is found in an aphorism put in the mouth of Themistocles (Hdt. 8.60.3): 'for humans who deliberate reasonably [it] generally wishes to work out (*ethelei ginesthai*); but for those who do not deliberate reasonably [it] does not wish nor does the god (sc. wish) to accede to the human plans (*ouk ethelei oude ho theos proschōreein pros tas anthrōpēias gnōmas*).' The initially impersonal *ethelei* seamlessly assumes *ho theos* as its subject: it is the same question, under different descriptions, whether 'it' wishes to turn out well for mortals and whether god wishes

[18] On the central prominence of these theological questions throughout Herodotus' narratives, see Harrison 2000 and Fowler 2010.

to accede to their plans.[19] Notably, Artabanus' aphorism about the consequences of haste at Hdt. 7.10.6 follows immediately upon a sustained reflection on god's tendencies and motivations in curtailing and facilitating human endeavours (Hdt. 7.10.5, discussed below) and Xerxes' remarks about rewards come right after his observations concerning specifically *human* uncertainty (Hdt. 7.50). So, even where we may indeed be disinclined to place interpretative weight on the personalisation of the syntactic subject itself, the expression of a regular pattern of events through volitional terms like *philein* or *ethelein* can still sometimes evoke implicitly, and at one remove, a volitional agency which underpins this pattern of events.[20]

Some moralising aphorisms may be thought to give us an *indirect* insight into the psychology of the syntactic subjects. The pejorative, rhetorical bite of the aphorism that 'soft men like to come from soft countries' (Hdt. 9.122) arguably relies in part on the insinuation that, because of their upbringing and environment, such men cannot help, not only becoming soft, but precisely becoming the sort of people who luxuriate in their softness. A similar take can be suggested for the aphorism that children who are heedless of their father's example 'like' to be corrupted (Democr. B228; cf. also Hdt. 8.68.3).[21] Indeed, Heraclitus' remark (B87) that 'a stupid person likes to get excited (*eptoēsthai philei*) at every account' is in the same vein (I will return to B87 below). We encounter unmistakably playful allusions to the personal *erotic* force of the verb in Herodotus' statement that 'the *hetairai* in Naucratis love in some sense (*phileousi de kōs*) to be particularly alluring' (Hdt. 2.135) and in Pindar's reference to those things which maidens 'love to murmur in

[19] The power of this transition is spoiled by the unnecessary emendation προσχωρέει (very much a *lectio facilior*!), so that ὁ θεός no longer governs ἐθέλει (the emendation, however, would not substantively affect my theological point). The term *ethelei* is here functionally equivalent to the uses of *philein* with the infinitive; the two terms are juxtaposed symmetrically in Hdt. 7.50 (quoted in this paragraph). For an initially impersonal use of the *philein* + infinitive construction, which subsequently introduces *ho theos* as the subject, cf. Hdt. 6.27 (discussed below). On the general phenomenon of the 'double motivation' or 'overdetermination' of human actions and endeavours, see Dodds 1951: 1–27.

[20] In the context of Democritus' ethics, is there any prospect for some comparable agency-at-one-remove which co-determines the achievement of 'respect' (*aidōs*), which 'likes' to come about through the proper education (B179), or the generation of 'shortages and excesses' which 'like' to cause disturbances in the soul (B191)? The question turns on the types of benefit and harm which Democritus had in mind when he prayed to meet only with 'propitious *eidōla*' and never with the malicious kind; see Plu. *de Def. Or.* 419a and S. E. *M* 9.19, with Taylor 1999: 214. In other occurrences of the construction in Herodotus, one may similarly trace the aphorisms to affective and volitional dispositions within the sphere of human psychology, as for example with the statement that rebukes like to rouse a man's anger (Hdt. 7.160; cf. also Hdt. 8.128, 3.82).

[21] On Democr. B228; cf. similarly Mouraviev 2006: 140.

evening songs' (*phileoisin . . . hupokourizesth*', *P.* 3.17–19; for the erotic context here, cf. *P.* 3.16, 3.20).

Some especially instructive uses of the construction demonstrate the significance of the point that, since the verb *philein* is not used here with some special and depersonalised semantic sense, the *possibility* is always there of taking its affective and volitional force seriously. In Herodotus 7.10.5, the Persian Artabanus cautions Xerxes:

> You see how the god smites with his thunderbolt (*keraunoi ho theos*) the creatures which stand out above and does not allow them (*oude ea*(*i*)) to make a show of themselves, but the little ones do not provoke him (*ouden min knizei*); and you see how it is always on the greatest buildings and trees that he hurls (*aposkēptei*) his bolts: for the god likes to curtail all things that stand out above (*phileei gar ho theos ta huperechonta panta kolouein*). And so in this way a large army is destroyed by a small one: whenever the god in his jealousy (*ho theos phthonēsas*) should throw fear or a thunderbolt among them, then they perish unworthily. For the god does not allow pride in anyone other than himself (*ou gar ea(i) phroneein mega ho theos allon ē heōuton*).

Artabanus not only identifies in god's conduct a regular and universal pattern of action, which manifests itself consistently and seamlessly in relation to human endeavours, animals, artefacts and natural objects, but also inscribes this pattern within a certain framework of affective dispositions and deliberate intention. Within this context, the construction *philein* + infinitive performs double duty. First, it articulates the general principle for which Artabanus cites examples both before and after this statement. Second, the verb *phileei* is imbued by, and itself augments, the repeated expressions of divine intentionality which surround this statement and permeate the passage. The nominative *ho theos* recurs four times. This emphatic repetition underscores the point that it is the same subject who is pleased and minded to curtail superior things as the one who is provoked to anger by them and is jealous of his pride in response to them. Here, then, the configuration of the construction brings to the fore the personal force of the verb *philein* – a term frequently used elsewhere to address the will, preferences and inclinations of the gods – and makes us highly conscious of it. God loves or is minded to curtail superior things: this is not merely a consistent pattern of action, but a policy of divine governance which is underpinned by a particular set of conscious affective and volitional dispositions.

In 6.27, Herodotus at first uses the construction impersonally: '[it] likes in some way to give a sign in advance (*phileei de kōs prosēmainein*),

whenever some great catastrophe is about to befall a city or a nation.' But, after specifying the 'great signs' which appeared to the Chians, Herodotus renders explicit the subject which was initially absent: 'the god showed them these signs in advance' (*tauta men sphi sēmēia ho theos proedexe*, 6.27). By first suppressing and then emphatically identifying the subject, Herodotus invites us to reread the initial statement by focusing our attention on those deliberate and intelligent divine dispositions which underpin the regular patterns of mantic signs and their interpretability. It is, of course, god who is minded to give a sign in advance. (Notably, the initial active infinitive, *prosēmainein*, expects a subject, and the recurrence of *pro-* in *proedexe* underscores the point that 'the god' is indeed the very subject which was left implicit in the initial statement.) To take one final example, Pindar states that 'the Muse likes to recall great contests' (*megalōn d'aethlōn Moisa memnasthai philei*), and then immediately follows up that assertion by invoking the Muse with an imperative: 'sow now some splendour' (*speire nun aglaian tina, N.* 1.11–13). By ascribing to the goddess this general attitude, Pindar endows the subsequent imperative with the air of a right-minded invocation. Pindar asks the goddess to pursue in this particular case ('now') an action which would be one instance of a general type of action which she is in general favourably disposed and minded to pursue.[22]

Is nature, then, minded to hide? The force of the verb *philein*, when it governs an infinitive, turns above all on the context (textual, conceptual, cultural, theological) within which the construction is configured. What, then, is the surrounding philosophical context in which we read and reread Heraclitus B123?

3 Back to Heraclitus

From multiple readings of Heraclitus' remarks, a network of connections and interrelations gradually emerges. Nature, god, fire, soul, wisdom, attunement (*harmoniē*), *logos*, war and law: these principles are connected to one another in a system of relations which looms large in the text and yet which it would be difficult (and perhaps ill-conceived) to try to pin down

[22] I discuss these passages here as particularly helpful illustrations of the potential of the construction *philein* + infinitive. They are not meant to represent anything like a comprehensive survey. Cf. e.g. also Soph. *Aj.* 988–9: 'you know, everybody is fond of laughing at the dead (φιλοῦσι πάντες . . . ἐπεγγελᾶν) when they are just lying about'; here, the infinitive ἐπεγγελᾶν underscores the point that this purported habit of morbid derision is something which its perpetrators relish and enjoy.