
Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy edited by Anthony Preus

Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements 78. Lanham, MD/Toronto/Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2007. Pp. xxiv + 345. ISBN 978-0-8108-5487-1. Cloth \$85.00

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This work, as its title indicates, is historical in focus. Its purpose is to provide general information about the lives and times of the ancient Greek philosophers, their professional associations and schools, the questions that they addressed, their basic doctrines, and the reception of those doctrines by subsequent thinkers in antiquity. Extensive interpretive discussions and the critique of modern scholarship are omitted. Preus' dictionary is thus best suited for undergraduate or beginning graduate students who require knowledge of the historical issues involved in the study of ancient philosophy.

Being a dictionary, this work contains an abundance of Greek terms. All the Greek, however, has been transliterated. The author begins with an extended 'Note' on transliterating and pronouncing the letters of the Greek alphabet (including diphthongs and breathing marks) to accommodate those who need to find the appropriate entry for a term that they might encounter elsewhere in Greek characters. Following the note on transliteration, a chronology includes the life spans of individual philosophers along with the dates of relevant social and political occurrences. This timeline has been divided into Hellenic, Hellenistic, and Roman Imperial periods, although the dictionary as a whole extends its coverage to the Medieval period.

A unique feature of this dictionary is its introduction: a concise narrative of key figures and ideas in their historical contexts. This survey emphasizes intellectual influences, associations, departures, successions, and traditions. Endnotes include handy references to the standard editions of the relevant texts, whether Greek, Latin or English. The general subjects and some specific topics that the introduction covers are as follows:

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- (1) The Presocratic Period (4 pp.): natural philosophy and the beginning of metaphysics; source problems; Pythagoras on philosophy; Xenophanes' epistemological scepticism; Heraclitus; Parmenides on being; Zeno on motion and dialectic; the elements of Empedocles and Anaxagoras; the Atomists; Sophists on teaching politics and rhetoric.
- (2) Socrates and Plato (2 pp.): the historical Socrates, sources for his life, his firm belief in the possibility of objective definitions; Plato, the chronology of his corpus, the unity of his thought; the Academy; Forms as objects of knowledge.
- (3) Aristotle (1.5 pp.): biographical information; the Aristotelian corpus; Aristotle's concern with empirical research; Aristotle on forms and the soul.
- (4) Hellenistic Philosophy (2 pp.): successors in the Lyceum and Academy; Pyrrho of Elis; Epicurus' Garden, atoms, and death; Zeno of Citium and early Stoics; the Library at Alexandria and its scholars.
- (5) The Academy Becomes Skeptical (2.5 pp.): Arcesilaus against the Stoics; Athenian philosophers in Rome; Panaetius' 'revisionist Stoicism'; Lucretius and Cicero; the Platonic dogmatism of Philo and Antiochus; changes to Stoicism under Posidonius.
- (6) Philosophy in the Roman Imperial Period (8 pp.): Platonism in Alexandria; Neopythagoreanism; Philo's synthesis of the Torah with the *Timaeus* and Stoicism; Roman court philosophers; Plutarch; second-century texts (AD) from varying traditions (e.g., Chaldean Oracles, Ptolemy's *Almagest*, the *Meditations*); Middle Platonists; Alexander of Aphrodisias; thinkers of the late second to early third centuries (e.g., Galen, Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius, Hippolytus); Clement and Ammonius; the Neoplatonists; Calcidius' Latin translation of the *Timaeus*; the Cappadocian philosophers; fourth and fifth century Neoplatonists in Athens; Jerome and Augustine; other important writers up to the close of the Athenian school in 529 (e.g., Macrobius, Stobaeus, Theodoret, Boethius).
- (7) The Survival and Transmission of Greek Philosophy in the Medieval Period (5.5 pp.): the fate of Greek philosophy from the seventh to 12th centuries; higher education in Constantinople; medieval Latin Neoplatonic theology; the manuscripts of Plato and Aristotle; the synthesis of Greek philosophy with Islamic thought;

Charlemagne and the transmission of Latin texts; Anselm and other 11th-century contributors to philosophy in western Europe; Latin translations; preview of the renaissance and modern world.

This overview should make it clear that, in terms of coverage, the introduction inclines towards the Imperial period and late antiquity. This stands to reason, as students tend to be least familiar with the thinkers, ideas, and traditions of these eras. Philosophically, the particular discussions in the introduction vary in helpfulness. For instance, the discussion of Parmenides on ‘what is’ is effective, but the discussion of Heraclitus simply states that he was concerned with *logos* and the ambiguity of language. One final note on the introduction: in the dictionary proper, the author has highlighted in bold print the various terms under a given entry that have their own entries as well. A similar device would have been helpful in the introduction.

The dictionary proper follows the introduction. It contains 250 pages of entries and covers an impressive range of topics: proper names, places, philosophical notions in English (e.g., Abstraction, Account, Chance, Law), schools, transliterated Greek terms (‘Adēlon’, ‘Ousia’, ‘Sympaschein’), including technical phrases, such as ‘ti esti’ and ‘to ti ēn einai’. A glossary provides brief definitions for all of the terms highlighted in the dictionary, whether Greek or English.

Some of the dictionary entries contain no more than the information from the introduction. For instance, the introduction on Jerome reads,

In the Roman world, Jerome (Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, 347–420) translated the Bible into Latin [19],

while the dictionary reads,

Jerome (347–420 CE). Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, translator of the Bible into Latin [148].

Most entries, however, expand upon the introduction (e.g., ‘Cosmos’, ‘Logos’), while some provide information that the introduction does not mention at all (e.g., ‘Alcmaeon of Croton’, ‘Aulos’, ‘Egyptian Origins of Greek philosophy’). Finally, several entries simply contain cross-references, such as ‘Cognition. See *Dianoia*; *Katalēpsis*; *Noēsis*; *Nous*’ [76].

One virtue of the dictionary is that most entries provide references to relevant primary texts and passages. A possible shortcoming, however, concerns entries that consist of English translations of Greek terms. Typically, only one or two translations have been provided for a given Greek term, so students might run into difficulties locating the appropriate entry if their source uses a translation that the dictionary does not use. For example, the entries 'Purpose' and 'End' direct the reader to the entry 'Telos', but there is no entry for 'Goal', an equally valid translation of the Greek. Likewise, 'Virtue' directs to 'Aretē', but there is no entry for 'Excellence'.

Students will find a great benefit in the bibliography, which contains not only references to the fundamental scholarly works for a given topic, but also a preliminary discussion on using standard research tools. This discussion covers both traditional and online materials, such as *L'Année Philologique*, journal indices, major journals in English, Greek lexica, encyclopedias (including an evaluation of the reliability of Wikipedia), databases (such as Perseus), and online sources for primary texts in translation.

In sum, the *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy* offers convenient access to a broad range of considerations that are essential to an historically sensitive study of ancient philosophy. No doubt it would have been especially welcomed and extensively utilized by the present reviewer had it been available when he began studying Greek philosophy in college.