

LESSONS IN THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY:
POPPER AND THE PRESOCRATICS

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There are two interconnected themes, and corresponding objectives, this paper aims to bring forth and defend. The first is a more general or encompassing claim regarding rationalist threads in the history of philosophy, while the second is a point internal to Popperian thought. Despite its apparent localised scope, the second point, it will be argued, can be seen to be connected to wider and fundamental concerns of our times in which contemporary philosophy seems to be entangled.

The first objective of this discussion is a fresh examination of Popper's contribution to the history of philosophy in European thought. In particular it will be looking into Popper's re-reading of ('back-to-the') Presocratic philosophers from the point of view of his own theses on human knowledge and explanatory patterns. It is believed that one of the basic accomplishments of such a contribution is the validity of the idea that we can discern patterns of lines of thought and interconnections or deviations within the history of western philosophy. This is in itself a vindication of the more general Popperian outlook (and 'mission'), so much pressed on by himself, to the effect that the open-endedness and enhancement of scientific knowledge is part of a discernible and well-definable 'tradition'.

The second objective of this paper will be brought out by a discussion specifically focused on Parmenides (bringing in recent studies in the Anglophone but also Francophone academic world). This is done in relation to Popper's own writings on this particular subject and his central (dual-aspect) claim about the inevitability and singularity of rationality (or the tradition of critical-rational discussion). The further, wider, purpose of this will be to effect a connection between this Popperian claim and Kant's vindication of (disciplined) reason against recent philosophical and social-scientific controversies proclaiming the 'end of reason' (either from the 'postmodernist'-skeptical or communitarian-relativist standpoints). It is thus important to see that Kantian themes can be supplemented in significant ways by Popper's views on the Presocratics against such anti-rationalist perspectives.