
ἄρχαί

AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL
THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

EDITORIAL | EDITORIAL

Style Matters in Presocratic Philosophy, an Introduction

Celso Vieiraⁱ

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3582-2122>
celso.deoliveiravieira@rub.de

Gabriele Cornelliⁱⁱ

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5588-7898>
cornelli@unb.br

ⁱ Ruhr Universität Bochum – Bochum – Alemanha

ⁱⁱ Universidade de Brasília – Brasília – DF – Brasil

VIEIRA, C.; CORNELLI, G. (2024). Style Matters in Presocratic Philosophy, an Introduction. *Archai* 34, 03403.

Presocratic philosophy occupies a transitional stage of Greek culture and marks a constitutive period in the Western history of ideas. The Presocratic philosophers flourished during a transition from an oral to a written culture whilst constituting what may be called a scientific and philosophical approach to inquiring into the world. The protean character of a transitional and constitutive period encompasses the discursive strategies used by the Presocratics. Instead of a prevalent model, each philosopher navigated on a vast repertoire of stylistic possibilities. These include the poetic and sapiential traditions, sympotic tropes such as riddles and paradoxes, and newer trends such as treatise, dialogues, and travel and historical narrative.

Despite these influences, the tentative constitution of what will come to be a philosophical approach suffices to warrant unprecedented originality to the Presocratic texts. Parmenides' poem follows a traditional structure, but it also sets novel signposts for a rational argumentation. One can even say that logic was first developed in verse. Anaximander's use of the vocabulary of justice in conceiving a regular cosmos was less a vivid metaphor than a conceptual bootstrapping, that is, a way to explore a new framework to reveal the regularity of the phenomena.

More than an aftermath between influence and innovation, it is also important to notice that the Presocratics did not make a clear cut distinction between the content of their reflection and its communication. In this context – more than in any other in the history of philosophy – style is part of the philosophical inquiry. If so, they should be analyzed together. This is the justification for this dossier. The *Style Matters in Presocratic Philosophy* aims to explore this unmatched historical context by gathering in-depth investigations centered around the philosophic role of stylistic choices among early Greek philosophers. One main takeaway of this dossier as a whole is the impression that the 'ancient quarrel' between poetry and philosophy, famously mentioned by Plato (*R.* 10.607b), may not be so ancient after all, or at least not so clear-cut.

Style here is understood broadly to include choices or coinage of words, syntactical and poetic structures and types of texts. The only delimitation is that the stylistic feature in question should set the basis for a philosophical reflection. The essays were organized in the following chronological order.

Leshner's article on argument in Xenophanes adds to a lifelong dedication that includes an essential translation and commentary on Xenophanes' fragments (1992). The article presents evidence such as cases of inference to the best explanation to challenge the tradition that arguments are first found in Parmenides.

Mackenzie goes in the other direction, challenging the stylistic assumption that Xenophanes's meter was clumsy. In an essay that complements his *Poetry and Poetics in the Presocratic Philosophers* (2021), he shows how the metrical choices fit Xenophanes' philosophical reasoning and thus enrich it.

Begley uses the phenomenon of markedness neutralisation to provide a much-needed understanding of Heraclitean oppositions and the Unity of Opposites thesis. Markedness neutralisation is a phenomenon whereby one member of a pair of opposites can appear as a designation for the encompassing whole. We use day in opposition to night, but also to denote the entirety of day and night. This phenomenon in Heraclitus would indicate a hierarchical metaphysical structure.

Costa examines the interdependence between content and literary form in Parmenides. He shows how the separation between the logical-argumentative language in the *aletheia* and the theoretic-description content of the *doxa* is necessary for a proper understanding of the relationship between these parts and a subsequent unified reading.

Berreuecos' consideration of Parmenides' metre follows a similar strategy to that of Mackenzie. He carefully identifies the anomalies in Parmenides' metre and finds consistency in their use. In what he calls poetic dislocation, phenomena such as the breaking of

Hermann's bridge, blurred caesuras, and enjambments are particularly suited to the worldview that Parmenides seeks to convey.

The difference in style between Zeno and Melissus on the one hand and Parmenides on the other is the subject of Brémond's contribution. Features such as a systematic and concise use of vocabulary, which are present in the second generation of the Eleatics but not in Parmenides' poem, convey a much more methodical approach to argumentation. Once we recognize this, it becomes difficult to ignore the importance of Zeno and Melissus for the style of philosophical argument.

Andolfi is another contribution that aims to challenge a traditional aspect of the reception of a Presocratic. Interpreters have followed Aristotle's critique of lack of clarity in Empedocles in order to attribute to Empedocles an intentional opaque style in the lines of Heraclitus. For Andolfi, pragmatics should inform the reason for Empedocles' style. The ambiguity in his text has more to do with his position as a charismatic guide and the choice of his ideal audience.

Peixoto investigates the various names used by atomists to refer to their invisible fundamental principles. The investigation explores what the different attempts might reveal about the principle they are trying to refer to and, more importantly, the metacognitive aspects behind the choice of a name for a new concept.

As editors, we would like to conclude by thanking the contributors. What we envisaged as a dossier to explore the connection between style and philosophy in this unique transitional period of Presocratic philosophy has turned out to be a volume that breaks with several conventional views of the Presocratics and has the potential to take the interpretation of style and Presocratic philosophy in a whole new and more fruitful direction. Whether this will be the case is up to our readers.

Bibliography

LESHER, J. H. (1992). Xenophanes of Colophon. *Fragments* (text and translation with a commentary). Toronto/Buffalo/London: Toronto University Press.

MACKENZIE, T. (2021). *Poetry and Poetics in the Presocratic Philosophers: Reading Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles as Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Submitted in 31/05/2023 and accepted for publication 04/09/2023.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Do you wish to submit a paper to *Archai Journal*? Please, access <http://www.scielo.br/archai> and learn our *Submission Guidelines*.
