

DAWES HICKS LECTURE ON PHILOSOPHY

The Anaxarchus Case: An Essay on Survival

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THIS PAPER WILL BE DEVOTED to the strange case of a little-known Greek philosopher, Anaxarchus of Abdera, who lived in the fourth century BC, some twenty-four centuries ago, and took part in Alexander's Eastern expedition.¹ In order to introduce him first in very summary terms, I would say that two contrasting features of his life are particularly striking. On the one hand, he was typically a court philosopher, a close friend to one of the mightiest kings of all times, Alexander the Great; as such, he was deeply and personally involved in the ideological debates concerning the powers and privileges of a quite new type of king, largely invented and impressively embodied by Alexander. No doubt this was a dangerous position; others came to know it from experience. But Anaxarchus survived; and the most widespread explanation for this survival is that he had flattered the king with an untiring cleverness. In the matter of survival (and perhaps in the matter of flattery as well), he was like another philosopher, much better known than him, who also followed Alexander: namely Pyrrho, the supposed founding father of ancient scepticism.²

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¹ Ancient testimonies about Anaxarchus, with two fragments from his treatise *On Kingdom*, are collected (not quite completely) in Diels-Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 1950⁶, chap. 72, vol. II, pp. 235–240. See also the review of the material and some early studies in Zeller-Mondolfo, *La filosofia dei Greci nel suo sviluppo storico*, I v (ed. A. Capizzi), Florence, 1969, pp. 314–317.

² Whereas we have some evidence about Anaxarchus' position and attitudes in Alexander's court, we know next to nothing about how Pyrrho behaved in this circle: Alexander's biographers never mention him. We could be tempted to think that he adopted a rather low

Pyrrho was a pupil and younger friend of Anaxarchus; he probably made the trip at his instigation.³ On the other hand, unlike Anaxarchus and Pyrrho, a third intellectual companion of Alexander was never to come back from the expedition, namely Callisthenes, a philosopher and historian, more or less appointed by Alexander to be his official biographer (hence his supposed authorship of the later *Romance of Alexander*). Callisthenes was a relative of Aristotle's, who himself had been Alexander's teacher for some years. He was put to death by Alexander, on a charge of having plotted against him.

Anaxarchus, then, survived King Alexander and his perilous friendship. But he did not survive him very long thereafter. Some years later, he was put to death, in frightful conditions, by a petty tyrant of Cyprus, called Nicocreon, who had hated him for a long time, apparently because of some cruel jokes Anaxarchus had directed at him in Alexander's days. Anaxarchus is repeatedly said by ancient sources to have died, in this circumstance, a quite heroic death, as we shall see later in more detail. And here is the first and main paradox of the Anaxarchus case. In his dealings with Alexander, Anaxarchus is often represented by our sources as a rather low-minded courtier, and even as a despicable flatterer and corruptor; nevertheless, when later on he fell into Nicocreon's hands, Anaxarchus died as a hero. On one occasion he knew how to survive; on another occasion he knew how *not* to survive.

My general claim will be that, among the enormously diversified types of intellectual figures bequeathed by Greek antiquity to Western culture, Anaxarchus offers a new and paradoxical pattern, the significance of which is still now quite worthy of attention. What I want to say about him will follow three main steps. First of all, I would like briefly to say something about my personal motivations and philosophical grounds for choosing this particular subject, here and now. Secondly, I shall give a short analysis of the main data we have kept about Anaxarchus. Then, in a third and final part, I shall try to support my claim that the intellectual pattern handed down by the traditions concerning Anaxarchus (and more generally the

profile; however, it should be remembered, first that he was no longer quite a young man at the time (he was roughly 30 years old when Alexander's campaign began), and secondly that he (although famous for having written nothing on philosophical matters) is said to have written a poem for Alexander, and to have been rewarded 'with thousands of gold pieces' (Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* I 282). He thus cannot be supposed to have followed Alexander *incognito*.

³ Cf. Diog. Laert. IX.61: 'Later (i.e. after having heard the lessons of another philosopher, called Bryson) he studied under Anaxarchus, whom he accompanied on his travels everywhere, so that he even forgathered with the Indian Gymnosopists and with the [Persian] Magi'.

other court-philosophers in Alexander's circle) had some unexpected and indirect descendants in our own time; and I shall offer, as a fitting example, the much discussed figure of the Italian writer and journalist Curzio Malaparte (1898–1957).

First of all, then, I shall attempt to answer the question of why I undertook to devote this paper to Anaxarchus, rather than to any other among so many interesting and better known figures of philosophical Antiquity. Two quite different features are especially interesting for me in his case: first, the fact that he both astutely survived King Alexander and heroically failed to survive Nicocreon the tyrant; and secondly, the peculiar nature of the evidence which survived concerning him. Anaxarchus' life and historical fate illustrate in a particular way two aspects of the phenomenon of survival: personal survival and informational survival.

I am much concerned and moved by the question of personal survival. Of course, for every living being, to live is to survive. But, for somebody born when I was born, and bearing the name I bear, this general truth has a quite special meaning. As is shown by a great number of examples, having survived World War II is a very ambiguous condition. On the one hand, quite obviously, a survivor can only be wholeheartedly grateful to those people who allowed him to survive; and here let me pay a silent homage to a number of individual persons who did so, and also an open homage to the British people.⁴ But, on the other hand, being a survivor, when so many people did not survive, is something rather difficult to live with. It is impossible to escape such painfully persistent questions as: Why me and not the other ones? Why the other ones and not me? There is, of course, no answer whatsoever to such questions. The survivors are by no means those who in any sense deserved to survive. The technical and moral conditions of modern war and persecution are quite incompatible with any simplistic, Darwin-like explanation; not only can the survivors not claim to be the fittest, the strongest, the boldest, but on the contrary, the strongest and boldest people endangered their lives more than any others, and paid the heaviest price for their boldness. On the other hand, any

⁴ If I am allowed to report a personal memory, I very well remember the powerful impression made on me, in June 1940, by Winston Churchill's proposal to make a single country out of France and the United Kingdom. Unlike the French government of the day, the little boy I was at the time fully accepted the suggestion, only worrying a bit about the linguistic problems it could possibly raise, for me and for some other people. If Churchill had been listened to at the time, perhaps today I would not have to apologize for my poor English; and many other, much more important things would be quite different from what they actually are.

inversed Darwinistic explanation would be equally ridiculous: it would be silly to assert point-blank that none of the survivors were in any sense entitled to survive.

Later on in my life, I naturally came to be much interested by the paradox of survivors, particularly within the intellectual world. Philosophers, historians, poets and writers often were either the unintended victims or the privileged targets of the various totalitarian persecutions which flourished in our century. Many of these persecuted people were reduced to silence, in some more or less definitive way. By definition, the philosophers and writers who were influential were the other ones, namely the survivors. Younger people sometimes accused them, or some of them, of having bought their survival at the price of prudence, if not of compromise and cowardice. Is it possible to be a hero without paying the price with one's life? Is it possible to be a survivor without being a traitor? If I had time enough, I would like to devote it to an inquiry about the most prominent cases of intelligentsia people of our century, whose dealings with the various totalitarian regimes raise, in various ways, this kind of question. Some of them were simply heroes; some of them were just traitors or cowards. Perhaps the most interesting cases, from the intellectual and ethical point of view, are the cases of those people who were neither full-fledged heroes, nor unmitigated traitors. Anaxarchus, in his double quality of Alexander's courtier and Nicocreon's victim, seems to me to impersonate, in some sense, both sides of this highly dramatic figure: the philosopher in front of the authoritarian powers. This double-faced Janus summarizes by himself the political tragedy of the intellectual involved in history. If we look for modern counterparts, we can find some cases in which the two faces of the picture are still more closely blended, because the king-tyrant duality, embodied by Alexander and Nicocreon, is no more to be found. The example of Bertold Brecht, whose life and work are so deeply permeated by the ethical problems of survival, would be a case in point. I shall explain, later on, why I preferred to take Curzio Malaparte as a modern counterpart of old Anaxarchus.

But I have a second reason for being interested in Anaxarchus, and this one concerns me more specifically as a historian of ancient philosophy: namely, the nature of our evidence concerning him. This evidence is very thin (5 pages in Diels-Kranz); the main bulk of it is made up of anecdotes of a highly dubious historical value; and we must confess that we know very little about his philosophy. Of course, there are lots of other ancient philosophers who are in exactly the same situation; and the hundreds of anecdotes which we have kept about them are usually considered as a frustrating plague, rather than as a source for any reliable information. It would be silly, of course, to make any general claim for the historical

accuracy of such anecdotes: it would be strange indeed if we could rely on such late reports of what is supposed to have been said and done by people of such a remote time, whereas we can easily check how difficult it is to know exactly what was said and done last week—or even one hour ago—by our friends, relatives, children or colleagues. The most we can hope, concerning ancient philosophers, and ancient famous people in general, is to learn something from these anecdotes, not about historical truth, but about the way the words and deeds of these famous people were usually interpreted and presented; for in many cases we can see that ancient biographers used to mould their stories according to various more or less stereotyped commonplaces of the day, either general or tailored to the specific character or doctrine of the particular person whose life is narrated.

However, there are two features which seem to be peculiar to the anecdotal material concerning Anaxarchus: first, that an important part of the evidence about him comes from sources of a type and nature which are different from the usual doxographical material (Diogenes Laertius and the like), namely historical or quasi-historical works written by Alexander's biographers, like Plutarch and Arrian;⁵ and secondly, that the image of the philosopher which is brought out by this evidence is much contrasted, probably more than in any other case, between very favourable reports and very hostile ones. These two features of the Anaxarchus records are likely to have the same origin, namely the public role played by the philosopher in Alexander's court. Alexander himself, as is well-known, had been the object of utterly contrasting assessments on behalf of Greek and Roman historians and philosophers;⁶ no doubt the ambiguity of Anaxarchus' image in the evidence available to us is explicable, at least in part, by the long-lived debates over the personality of his royal master

⁵ One should not exaggerate, however, the difference between the literary genres to which these works belong. Diogenes Laertius has a short and mainly anecdotal notice on Anaxarchus (IX.58–60, cf. also 61 and 63); but he mentions Plutarch as one of his sources (60), and this is (with another brief mention in IV 4) the only time he quotes him. This is no wonder, since Plutarch, at the beginning of his *Life of Alexander*, himself insists that he is writing not 'histories', but 'lives', with a mainly ethical end ('showing virtue and vice'); his way of writing, judging from what he says, is governed by the idea that the 'moral character' (*èthos*) is better revealed by a small fact or utterance, by a joke, than by conspicuous actions like deadly fights, pitched battles and sieges.

⁶ And also in modern times, of course. The relevant bibliography is enormous. See the copious references given by Pierre Vidal-Naquet in his important post-face ('Flavius Arrien entre deux mondes') to Arrian, *Histoire d'Alexandre* (French translation by P. Savinel), Paris, 1984, and his no less valuable preface ('Les Alexandres') to the fascinating book by Ch. Grell and Ch. Michel, *L'École des Princes ou Alexandre disgrâcié*, Paris, 1988. On the particular subject of how Alexander's figure was described and assessed in Hellenistic times, see P. Goukowsky, *Essai sur les origines du mythe d'Alexandre*, Nancy, 1978–1981.

and friend. Given the frequency of the question every historian of ancient philosophy is confronted with, of what to do with this massive anecdotal stuff which takes up so much space in our evidence, I am sure that Anaxarchus offers a case in point for reflection in this respect, on account of the very lack of unity in the traditions concerning him.⁷

There is, I think, some sort of link between the two reasons I have to be interested in Anaxarchus. His real life raises questions about the physical survival of a philosopher in a given social and political context; his posthumous life raises questions about the historical survival of his ideas and his intellectual and moral personality. He thus offers an opportunity for a case-study in philosophical survival in two different respects, which perhaps are not completely independent from each other. It is a very old Greek idea, illustrated by a famous saying attributed to Solon, that a man cannot be called a happy man as long as he is living.⁸ The Solonian motto can be seen lurking behind many anecdotes in the Greek biographical tradition, which often describe with many concrete details the way famous people died. The moral of such stories seem to be: tell me how you died (how you stopped surviving, if I may say so), and I shall tell you what sort of person you really were. And conversely: tell me how you survived (how you missed some opportunity of dying a certain way), and I shall tell you what (quite different) sort of person you were. In some cases, famous people, for instance philosophers, seem to have found exactly the kind of death which could be expected from them, given their doctrines and intellectual personality. But of course, it was tempting for ancient biographers to get things the other way around, and to concoct death stories which were exactly what would be expected from the philosopher concerned, given his philosophy, or some detail of his physical or physiological doctrines.

Curiously enough, the Solonian saying has a special relevance to Anaxarchus: for we know that he was nicknamed 'the Happy Man' (or, more exactly, 'the Happiness Man', *eudaimonikos*), supposedly because of 'his complete imperturbability (*apatheia*) and the evenness of his temper (*eukolia tou biou*)' (Diogenes Laertius IX.60; cf. Sextus *Adv. Math.*

⁷ The ambiguity of the evidence concerning Anaxarchus was already the starting-point of a tentative defence of this philosopher, published in 1772 by J. A. Dathe (*Prolusio de Anaxarcho philosopho eudaemonico*, Leipzig). I am indebted to Myles Burnyeat for a xerox copy of this curious and interesting piece.

⁸ Pierre Aubenque offers profound comments on this Solonian saying in *Le problème de l'Être chez Aristote*, p. 469 (even if its relevancy towards the interpretation of the Aristotelian phrase *to ti ên einai* seems more questionable): 'Seule la mort peut, dans le cas du vivant, arrêter le cours imprévisible de la vie, transmuier la contingence en nécessité rétrospective, séparer l'accidentel de ce qui appartient vraiment par soi au sujet qui n'est plus. C'est la mort de Socrate qui façonne l'essence de Socrate: celle du juste injustement condamné'.

VII.48). In later times, Anaxarchus was even credited (no doubt by virtue of an illegitimate expansion on this nickname) with having been the founding father of a specific philosophical school, called the Eudemonic School.⁹ Perhaps the two motives given by Diogenes Laertius as justifications for Anaxarchus' nickname, his 'complete imperturbability', and 'the evenness of his temper', correspond (in chiasmic order) to the two forms of happiness illustrated by what we might call his two deaths, namely the death he *failed* to meet at Alexander's court, as an easy-going and supple-minded companion, and the death he did meet in Nicocreon's torture rooms, as a heroic victim of tyranny. All in all, both aspects are present in the contrasted image of him which is handed down by our sources. On the one hand, the antagonism between Anaxarchus the vile courtier and survivor, and Callisthenes the victim and the noble opponent, seems to have been used, in some philosophical circles, as a sort of conventional antithesis, purposely designed for illustrating two opposite types of philosophical attitudes towards the king.¹⁰ On the other hand, Anaxarchus' real death in the hands of tyranny makes him a worthy companion of the heroes and martyrs of ancient wisdom, in many late pagan and even Christian texts.¹¹ In front of such so deeply contrasting traditions, have we got a chance to take up the challenge and to make out any consistent picture of this delusive figure?

⁹ Cf. Pseudo-Galen, *Histor. philos.* 4 (Diels, *Doxographi graeci*, p. 602): '[Some philosophical schools get their name] from the end (*telos*) they aim at, for instance the eudemonic philosophy; for Anaxarchus said that happiness was the end of the way of life which he advocated'. The school of *Eudaimonikoi* is mentioned (without naming Anaxarchus) by Diogenes Laertius I 17.

¹⁰ This *topos*, by the way, was to survive through centuries. It is still to be found in *Callisthène*, a rather dull French tragedy in five acts and in verse, written in 1730 by a second rank poet called Alexis Piron—a rather funny name in this particular context. In this play, Callisthenes is the virtuous hero, and Anaxarchus is the villain. I cannot here resist the temptation of adding that the only thing by virtue of which Piron is still a little known, nowadays in France, is the witty epitaph he wrote for himself:

Ci-gît Piron qui ne fut rien
Pas même académicien.

¹¹ Cf. (not in DK) Cic. *ND* III 82, Philod. *De morte* IV (PHerc. 1050) XXXV 31–34 (Socrates, Zeno of Elea and Anaxarchus quoted as exemplary models of behaviour in front of death) and *Acta martyr. Pion.* 17, 1–4, ap. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*, vol. I, p. 311 (Socrates, Aristides and Anaxarchus quoted as examples of people who have 'practiced philosophy, justice and endurance'). More often, as we shall see, Anaxarchus is associated only with Zeno of Elea in this context. Many other references to Anaxarchus' death are given by A. S. Pease, ed. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, n. ad III 82.

Let us now go back to the main data concerning Anaxarchus. He was born (about 380 BC, or a little later) in Abdera, the native city of other and more famous philosophers, in particular Protagoras and Democritus. According to the ancient writers on philosophical 'successions', he was linked to Democritus by a direct chain of pupil-to-master relations;¹² he is often called a 'Democritean',¹³ and he seems to have been at least acquainted with some aspects of Democritean cosmology.¹⁴ But in the meantime, the Democritean tradition is supposed to have been inflected into a sceptical direction; the seeds of this sceptical bent were notoriously present in Democritus himself, and apparently developed with Metrodorus of Chios, who stands somewhere between Democritus and Anaxarchus in the doxographical tradition of 'successions'. Anaxarchus himself is registered by later writers as a sceptical philosopher,¹⁵ as is convenient for a friend and a master of Pyrrho's. It has also been suggested with good reasons, that Anaxarchus was strongly influenced by Cynicism.¹⁶

It is difficult to assess the philosophical calibre of a man who seems to have been such a knot of various influences. Plutarch, however, says that 'from the beginning he had taken an original way in philosophy (*idian tina hodon en philosophiai*), and had a reputation for despising and looking down on his fellow-philosophers'. This frustrating remark does not say anything about the substantial content of his philosophical originality. In order to stick to what is probably the most prudent interpretation of it, we might suppose that the second part of the sentence is offered as an explanation of the first part, so that Plutarch would not refer to any

¹² Cf. Diog. Laert. IX 58 (DK 72A1), Clem. Alex. *Strom.* I 64 (DK 70A1), Euseb. *PE* XIV.17.10 (DK 69A1).

¹³ Cf. e.g. Cic. *ND* III 82.

¹⁴ Cf. Plut. *De tranquill. an.* 466D and Val. Max. VIII 14 (DK 72A11): the famous story about Alexander, taught by Anaxarchus about the infinite plurality of worlds, and weeping because he had not yet completely mastered only one of them.

¹⁵ Cf. [Gal.] *H.ph.* 7 (DK72A15). The most prominent testimony to Anaxarchus' scepticism is the famous saying attributed to him (and simultaneously to the Cynic Monimus) by Sextus Empiricus *M* VII 88: 'They likened existing things to a scene-painting (*skènographia*), and supposed them to resemble the impressions experienced in sleep or madness'. In spite of the 'Shakespearean splendour' of this saying, I shall abstain from any sustained comment, because Myles Burnyeat has written a fascinating paper (unfortunately as yet unpublished) which is devoted to a brilliant elucidation of its meaning, in the general context of scenery, optics and Greek epistemology. I can only hope that this outstanding paper will be published before long. As Burnyeat remarks, all the unpleasant features one might find in the evidence about Anaxarchus might be forgiven in return of this memorable saying.

¹⁶ See A. M. Ioppolo, 'Anassarco e il Cinismo', in F. Romano (ed.), *Democrito e l'atomismo antico*, Catania, 1980, pp. 499–506. On the association between Anaxarchus and the Cynic Monimus, see the preceding note. Needless to say, however, Anaxarchus' attitude towards Alexander is in complete contrast with the attitude adopted, according to some famous stories, by Diogenes the Cynic.

doctrinal originality after all, but only to Anaxarchus' aggressive way of dealing with other philosophers in Alexander's court, despising and contradicting all of them (and especially Callisthenes, his favourite butt of contradiction). But even if we agree on this prudent view of his alleged originality, we must admit, I think, that he was by no means an ordinary mind. Plutarch significantly says that when Alexander came to dislike Aristotle, his former teacher, his esteem for Anaxarchus was a proof that his ingrained love for science, culture and philosophy had not run away from his soul (*V. Alex.* 8); he also says that Alexander held Anaxarchus to be the worthiest of his friends (*Alex.virt.* 331e, DK72A4). To have succeeded Aristotle in Alexander's mind and esteem, for whatever good or bad reasons, is certainly not a negligible feat. And of course the same could be said about Anaxarchus having been a master and a friend to Pyrrho, even if Pyrrho's final judgment about him seems to have been somewhat mitigated, as we shall see later on.

In the matter of written work, the only book which Anaxarchus seems to have produced, as far as we know, is a treatise 'On Kingship' (*Peri basileias*), from which we have kept two quotations (DK 72B1 and 2). These fragments are important for my purpose, because they show that the subject-matter of the book was not (or not only) monarchy as a political concept, but rather (or also) the various problems raised by the relationship between the intellectual and the king. Anaxarchus apparently had something to say, in this respect, at least on two particularly important points, which both bear on the general problem of communication between the king and his philosopher-subject: namely, speech and money.¹⁷

The first fragment (DK 72B1, reconstructed from partial quotations by Clement of Alexandria and Stobaeus) deals with the question of *parrhèsia*, 'outspokenness', which was of course a central concern in Alexander's circle, as in any circle close to supreme political power.¹⁸ Anaxarchus says

¹⁷ In this regard, his views seem to have interestingly influenced Epicurus in his own treatise *Peri basileias*: see M. Gigante and T. Dorandi, 'Anassarco e Epicuro "Sul regno"', in F. Romano (ed.), *Democrito e l'atomismo antico*, Catania, 1980, pp. 479–497. On other possible aspects of Anaxarchus' views about monarchy, cf. below.

¹⁸ And not only in this particular political context: *parrhèsia*, 'free speech', was of course a similarly central concern in many areas of Greek public and private life. Two texts are particularly important in this respect: Philodemus' *Peri parrhèsias* (PHerc. 1471, ed. Olivieri, 1914) and Plutarch's *De adulatore et amico*. M. Gigante, who is preparing a new edition of Philodemus' treatise, has published a number of studies on this text (cf. *Ricerche Filodemeae*, Naples, 1983²). Cf. also A. Momigliano, 'La libertà di parola nel mondo antico', *Rivista di Studi Italiani* LXXXIII, 1927, pp. 215–230; F. Peterson, 'Zur Bedeutungsgeschichte von "Parrhesia"', in *Festschrift R. Seeberg*, 1929; G. Scarpat, *Parrhesia: Storia del termine e delle sue traduzioni in latino*, Brescia, 1964; I. Gallo, 'La parrhesia epicurea e il trattato "de Adulatore et Amico" di Plutarco: qualche riflessione', *Quaderni del Giornale Filologico Ferrarese* IX, 1988. I am indebted to Marie-Pierre Peraldi for these references. Michel Casevitz is currently preparing a book on the subject.

that much knowledge, *polumathiè*, may be useful or harmful,¹⁹ according to whether the much-knowing man says ‘anything to anybody’, or knows ‘the measures of opportunity’ (*kairou metra*). Such a knowledge is the defining criterion of wisdom (*sophiès horos*). This remark might have, at least partly, a quite concrete bearing: it could be directed against Callisthenes, who, according to Aristotle himself, had been terribly rash in the matter of *parrhèsia* towards Alexander.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is couched in distinctly theoretical terms, and offers at least a generalizing reflection over Callisthenes’ fatal story. The second fragment of the *Peri basileias* seems to refer to the problem of how to make one’s living when being a wise and prudent man subject to a rich and powerful king: speaking once again from an impersonal point of view (but perhaps on the basis of his own experience), Anaxarchus implicitly presents himself as an expert in making money, and also (‘a more difficult thing’) in keeping it. Both fragments confirm that the relation between the philosopher and political powers was for Anaxarchus a crucial problem: not only an opportunity for reflecting on his personal experience in this field, but also a question which he tried to approach in a universal and philosophical way.

Now, apart from these two scraps of direct quotations which we have kept from the *Peri basileias*, we have to admit that the main bulk of evidence concerning Anaxarchus is made up of anecdotes, coming either from Diogenes Laertius, this untiring purveyor of anecdotes, or from the biographical and historical traditions concerning Alexander. Leaving the end of the story for a later time, and methodically abstaining from any mental reference to Anaxarchus’ heroic death after he had fallen into the hands of his murderer, let us have a look at what we learn, or are supposed to learn, about his attitude at Alexander’s court.

The evidence here is fairly substantial, if still mainly of an anecdotal type. But two points here might be stressed. First of all, Alexander’s life was the thoroughly public life of a very remarkable and famous man; most of his words and deeds were observed by lots of direct witnesses, and reported by a great number of first-hand (if obviously not unbiased)

¹⁹ Perhaps tacitly correcting Heraclitus’ famous attack on *polumathiè*, DK 22B40. Heraclitus and Anaxarchus on *polumathiè* are associated and contrasted by Serenus ap. Stob. II 31.116 (cf. M. Marcovich, *Heraclitus*, Merida, 1967, pp. 62–63).

²⁰ Cf. Diog. Laert, V 5: ‘When Callisthenes talked with too much freedom (*parrhèsiastikôteron*) to the king and disregarded his own advice, Aristotle is said to have rebuked him by citing the line (Hom. *Il.* XVIII 95): “Short-lived, I ween, wilt thou be, my child, by what thou sayest”’. Plutarch (*V. Alex.* 54) gives a sharper version of Aristotle’s opinion on Callisthenes (perhaps *post eventum*): ‘he was great and powerful in speech, but he had no brains (*noun ouk eikhen*)’. On Callisthenes’ dangerous *parrhesia* in front of Alexander, cf. also Plut. *V. Alex.* 53, Arr. *Anab.* IV 10.1–4.

historians and chroniclers. Our sources about Alexander and Anaxarchus (mainly Plutarch, Arrian, Diogenes Laertius) are much later than the times they speak of; but their authors made use, and sometimes a critical use, of a bulk of lost evidence. Secondly, even if the literal accuracy of the anecdotes concerning Anaxarchus' attitudes, speeches and witticisms is obviously open to the most serious doubts, we know that he wrote his treatise *On Kingship*. Accordingly, in the worst hypothesis, we could still think that the anecdotes were simply forged in order to illustrate the views expressed by Anaxarchus on the subject. In this way, the worst hypothesis about their historical accuracy would also be the best possible hypothesis about their philosophical significance.

One trend in the evidence, no doubt the most influential in the tradition, depicts Anaxarchus as a pretty disgusting flatterer, who spoiled Alexander and encouraged his worst tendencies. But even the most hostile reports cannot conceal the amount of political reflexion and philosophical references which were underlying Anaxarchus' pronouncements. An example in point is the famous episode of the murder of Cleitus, a close friend of Alexander's, killed by the king himself in a fit of anger. Some time after the murder, so the story goes (Arrian, *Anab.* IV 9.7, DK 72A5; Plut. *V.Alex.* 52, DK 72A3),²¹ Alexander was found prostrated and sobbing. Philosophical therapy was then offered a chance. Callisthenes first tried a soft medicine (*èthikôs kai praiôs*), 'appealing to the king's reason and making use of circuitous ways in order to alleviate his pain'—without any success. Anaxarchus then took the hard way: he is said to have openly scoffed at the king, saying: 'Here is the great Alexander, whom the whole world looks at! Here he is, prostrated and weeping like a slave, shuddering in front of the law and the blame of men, to whom he should himself be the law and the limits of right (*horon tôn dikaiôn*), since he has been victorious on them to be their master and their leader, and not to be their slave, dominated by empty opinion. Don't you know that Zeus is represented with Dikè and Themis as his acolytes, in order to show that whatever is done by the mighty one is just and legitimate?'

²¹ According to Diels-Kranz (*ad loc.*), Plutarch's source would here be Hermippus (late 3rd century), a Peripatetic or Peripatizing biographer of many people, perhaps including Callisthenes. Hermippus is quoted by Plutarch at the beginning of § 54 (not 67, a misprint in DK), as quoting himself the report made to Aristotle by Strobilos, Callisthenes' 'reader'. As a matter of fact, it seems difficult to be quite positive about the scope of the word *tauta*, designating 'these things' which are covered by the authority of this apparently very reliable source; but the whole stretch of §§ 52–54 looks actually like a closely continuous textual unit, systematically contrasting Callisthenes and Anaxarchus. One might suppose that Hermippus was an active worker in the setting out of the highly symbolical antithesis between the two philosophers.

Here, admittedly, a courtier is speaking (let us remember that he is talking about a crime after all), but obviously a reflective, philosophically-minded and cleverly allegorizing courtier. His speech has even been hailed as a turning-point in the history of political thought, because it was the first to offer to Alexander a full theoretical justification of his practical tendencies towards Persian-like absolutism.²² Actually, we should not exaggerate the 'exotic' dimension of Anaxarchus' speech, nor underestimate the probability that Anaxarchus had in mind some previous (perfectly Greek) philosophical pictures of a god-like and lawless king, as could be easily found in Plato and Aristotle;²³ but he nonetheless emerges as acutely aware of the fact that now this sort of picture was no longer a theoretical blue print. He was seeing in Alexander a quite new type of monarch, in respect to which the traditional distinction between kingship and tyranny (between a way of ruling according to the laws, or according to one's own wishes and whims) was fading away—he had to wait for the end of his life to see that there were still some differences between a king like Alexander and a tyrant like Nicocreon. Perhaps such a political analysis was set forth in his treatise *On Kingship*, and the anecdote and speech were invented or twisted, so as to give a concrete illustration of his views on monarchy; perhaps also the philosopher himself took advantage of his own political culture and reflexion, and said to the king at least something like the eloquent and clever speech which is put into his mouth. Who knows whether the anecdote was made out to exemplify the theory, or the actual behaviour of the philosopher was given its shape by his own political conceptions?

In Anaxarchus' speech after the murder of Cleitus, Alexander is only *compared* to Zeus. As is well-known, this was not enough for him. No less famous is the fact that he sought to be considered as a god; and here again we find Anaxarchus often mentioned, in our sources, as having been one of the most prominent spokesmen in favour of Alexander's deification, and particularly of the obligation made to everybody to prostrate himself in front of him (*proskunèsis*). Callisthenes, as usual, was Anaxarchus' opponent in these burning debates.

²² Cf. Goukowsky, *op. cit.* n. 6 above, I, pp. 46 ss. According to Goukowsky, Anaxarchus had on this point a most distinguished opponent, namely Aristotle himself; for the 'bad adviser' criticized by [Aristotle] in his famous *Letter to Alexander* (which Goukowsky believes to be substantially genuine) would be no other than Anaxarchus.

²³ We can think not only of Callicles' doctrine that might is right (*Gorg.* 483d–484c), but also of Plato's ideal statesman, who is in possession of the genuine kingly science, and 'employing it as a stronger power for good than any written laws' (*Pol.* 297a), and of the political genius depicted by Aristotle, who stands above the laws and who, 'like a god among men', 'is himself the law' (*Pol.* III 13, 1284a3–17).

Now, if we look first at the evidence concerning Alexander's deification in general, the striking thing about Anaxarchus is that many testimonies show him as openly making fun of Alexander's claims to divinity; he seems to have allowed himself many witty and very sharp jokes on this rather dangerous subject. I have no time to quote these jokes and to comment on them—a job which has already been very aptly done by some experts in the matter.²⁴ I only note that Alexander seems to have understood and accepted such jokes with indulgence and even laughingly, like a powerful king listening to his appointed jester, and sharing his cynical view of the matter: according to Plutarch (*V. Alex.* 28.6), he did not take his own claims to divinity much more seriously than Anaxarchus himself, and he consciously used them as a purely political tool.

This side of Anaxarchus' attitude towards Alexander might lead us not to see him as a simple and, so to speak, first-order flatterer. There are many other arguments in the same sense. For instance, some traits of apparently pure and unalloyed flattery are indeed attributed to Anaxarchus by some of our sources, but to other people by other sources.²⁵ Still more significant, perhaps, is the fact that Plutarch, who in his *Life of Alexander* certainly describes Anaxarchus as one of the leading figures in the circle of Alexander's flatterers, does not even mention him in his treatise *On the Difference between Flatterer and Friend*, a treatise in which he carefully enumerates all the people who spoiled Alexander by their excessive adulation (cf. 65C–D).

Such variations and uncertainties might be, and have indeed been, interpreted as the effect of a double tradition concerning Anaxarchus, one favourable to him, the other one hostile. There are undoubtedly some traces of such divergent traditions. For instance, it is quite certain that on the whole Anaxarchus was ill-treated by the Peripatetic school, which tended to defend Callisthenes' cause against him. In particular, Anaxarchus

²⁴ Cf. in particular Satyrus ap. Athen. VI. 250E, Plut. *V. Alex.* 28.4–6, DL IX.58–59 (DK 72A1 and 4). A detailed and illuminating explanation of Anaxarchus' elaborate jokes has been offered by Paul Bernard, 'Le philosophe Anaxarque et le roi Nicocréon de Salamine', *Journal des Savants*, 1984, pp. 3–49, an outstanding paper to which I wish to refer the reader for further information.

²⁵ A speech on flatterers, apparently attributed to Anaxarchus by Philodemus (*De adul.* IV, DK 72A7, but see now the textual remarks in Gigante and Dorandi, *art. cit.* above, n. 17, pp. 494–496, who reject Crönert's integration, which Diels had kept), is attributed by Plutarch (*De adul. et am.* 60B) to another companion of Alexander, called Agis of Argos. Similarly, an argument in favour of *proskunèsis*, attributed to Anaxarchus by Arrian, *Anab.* IV 10.5, is attributed to the Sicilian Cleon by Q. Curtius VIII 5.8 (DK 72A6). It would have been easy for these stories to migrate in the direction of the best-known person in the supposed group of Alexander's flatterers, namely Anaxarchus.

was described in awfully bad terms by Clearchus, who was a direct pupil of Aristotle.²⁶

However, I do not think that the hypothesis of a double tradition is quite enough to account for the situation. Rather, I suppose that if something like a double tradition could simply arise, it is because Anaxarchus' own attitude was fairly complex, and made it possible, for each branch of the double tradition, to develop by stressing only one side of it.

This point might be argued on the basis of a fragment of Timon, which is interesting and meaningful, because Timon, the best-known of Pyrrho's disciples and his main spokesman, is chronologically our first informant about Anaxarchus, and by far the earliest one. He himself could only have been informed about Anaxarchus' personality directly by Pyrrho (without denying, of course, the possibility of a direct reading of Anaxarchus' book or books by Timon). In a preserved fragment of his *Silloi* (this satirical review of most past and present philosophers of his time), Timon gives a significantly ambiguous characterization of Anaxarchus, which might reflect, as we shall see a little later, Pyrrho's own disappointment with his friend and master. 'There, Timon says (fr. 58), Anaxarchus showed his canine ardour, daring and obstinate, wherever he rushed; however wise, so they said, he was miserable; this nature vulnerable to pleasure, which puts to flight so many sophists, was driving him back'. The latest editor of the *Silloi*, the Italian scholar Massimo di Marco, very aptly comments upon this fragment (*Timone di Fliunte—Silli*, Rome, 1989, p. 244), by saying that the prominent note in this couplet certainly is one of blame and irony: Anaxarchus is described as a typical *akratès*, and also, as a man who had forgotten his own criterion for wisdom, namely the 'measures of opportunity', in talking with the mighty ones.²⁷ However, the difficulty of

²⁶ According to Clearchus (ap. Athen. XII 548B, DK 72A9), Anaxarchus was an arch-refined sybarite, ordering his chef to wear gloves and a mouth-mask so as to avoid spoiling the food; nobody but a naked pretty slave-girl was allowed to pour him out his wine. On the part possibly played by Hermippus in the moral disqualification of Anaxarchus, cf. n. 21 above and n. 32 below. The idea of a 'Peripatetic cabal', already advocated by Johannes Luzac (*Lectiones Atticae*, 1809), is quoted with favour by Th. Gomperz in 'Anaxarch und Kallisthenes', *Commentationes Philologicae in honorem Theodori Mommseni*, Berlin, 1877, pp. 471–480 (on which more later) and by Paul Bernard, *art. cit.* (above n. 24).

²⁷ It seems quite possible that Timon, when describing Anaxarchus as 'miserable' although having a reputation for 'wisdom', is ironically alluding both to Anaxarchus' claim of knowing the 'measures of opportunity' in talking with monarchs, and to his later being tortured and put to death by one of them, just because he had forgotten the *kairos*, i.e. his own defining criterion for wisdom. Timon here seems, with a good measure of irony, to turn against Anaxarchus the reproach of imprudent *parrhèsia* which Anaxarchus himself had probably directed against Callisthenes: he had been unable to protect himself from the dangers he claimed to be, unlike his old enemy, completely immune to. The words *hos rha kai eidôs*, in line 2 of Timon's fragment, are shown by Di Marco to be a parody of Homer, *Il.* XIII 665,

defining Anaxarchus' personality in a simple and univocal way is very well testified by the quick alternation of lights and shadows in Timon's fragment. To show Anaxarchus as carried away by his lust for pleasure, like so many sophists, is of course no compliment; but to associate him with the Cynics, as is likely to be done through the description of his 'canine ardour', was certainly not a piece of blame, in Timon's view. This fragment thus confirms, as in a nutshell, what already emerges, according to Massimo di Marco, from Anaxarchus' fluctuating attitude towards Alexander, and from the contrast between his indulgence in fleshly pleasures and his heroic death: namely, the features of 'a complex figure, in many respects ambiguous, marked by deep and possibly unresolved contradictions'. Moreover, it is a good piece of evidence in favour of the very early origin, and quite respectable historical pedigree, of this ambivalent picture, which is not the conflation of two branches of tradition independently grown before mingling with each other, but which on the contrary seems to be earlier than the process of autonomization of each of its facets. It comes straight from Timon, himself a close associate of Pyrrho's, who had shared Anaxarchus' life and interests for many years.

A nice anecdote, concerning Pyrrho himself, supports the point. According to Diogenes Laertius IX 63 (no doubt taken from the *Life of Pyrrho* by Antigonos of Carystus), 'Pyrrho would withdraw from the world and live in solitude, rarely showing himself to his relatives; this he did because he had heard an Indian reproach Anaxarchus, telling him that he would never be able to teach others what is good while he himself danced attendance on kings in their courts'. We can infer from this anecdote, with all due caution, first that Anaxarchus claimed to be able 'to teach others what is good', when asked what his 'profession' was,²⁸ and secondly, that Pyrrho took advantage of the 'lesson' given by the Indian to his master and friend, adopting for himself, at least in the long run, a quite different way of life.

The ambivalent impression made by Anaxarchus on Timon, and quite

a passage in which a warrior, who is the son of a soothsayer, is said 'to know what a disastrous death was in store for him'. For the sophisticated reader to whom Timon is speaking, the hint might have been transparent.

²⁸ This is quite in line with what is said about him by Diogenes Laertius IX 60: 'He had the capacity of mending people's manners (*sôphronizein*) in the easiest possible way'. Diogenes illustrates this capacity by telling that 'he succeeded in diverting Alexander when he had begun to think himself a god; for, seeing blood running from a wound he had sustained, he pointed to him with his finger and said: See, there is blood and not "Ichor which courses in the veins of the blessed gods"' (Hom. *II*. V 340). Diogenes adds, rightly, that Plutarch reports this as spoken by Alexander himself to his friends (cf. *V. Alex.* 28). Perhaps Alexander had taken advantage of Anaxarchus' remark, and was able to serve it up again.

plausibly on Pyrrho himself, was not groundless. I suspect that it was the result of Anaxarchus' own studied attempt to give such an image of himself; for he seems to have made a sort of ironical ambivalence into a real, sophisticated and almost systematic technique of discourse. Philodemus, in a fragment of his treatise *On Flattery* (cf. above, n. 25), gives what seems to me a rather biased picture of this technique, suggesting that it is nothing more than a subtler way of flattering than the ordinary, direct one. According to Philodemus, its formula is 'to juxtapose sweetness and sharpness, not at random but artfully, mingling for instance a good admixture of praise with a small one of blame, and agreement with contradiction; such is this kind of praise, in which, when it is accepted, some people send rather sharp things, while using a stronger dose of sweetness. Such was Anaxarchus, as they say'. After a lacuna in the text (cf. n. 25), we find an example of this technique of sophisticated adulation (the same which is also preserved by Plutarch, but attributed by him to Agis). Whoever he was, the courtier in question found a way of flattering Alexander while blaming him precisely for listening to flatterers: such a complacency, he said, was suitable 'for the offspring of Zeus, since Dionysos enjoyed the company of Satyrs (i.e. of goat-men) and Herakles the company of Kerkopes (i.e. of monkey-men)'. Philodemus and Plutarch present this sort of speech as a way of composing a mixture of praise and blame, with a predominance of praise. I am not sure that this interpretation really does justice to this many-faced joke. Alexander, for sure, is hailed as Zeus' offspring, and compared to Dionysos and Herakles; but what he is supposed to have in common with them is precisely a very weak point of theirs, namely their readiness to enjoy the company of inferior beings. Taking everything into account, I would rather say that the mixture is at least carefully balanced, and, in the last analysis, rather disrespectful: the dosage of praise and blame seems to be quite the opposite of what could be expected on the basis of Philodemus' description of the drug.

The particular debate about *proskunèsis* and the arguments Anaxarchus is supposed to have produced in favour of this Oriental way of honouring the king offer other examples of the technique summarily described by Philodemus, and it is worthwhile to analyse these arguments carefully. The problem of *proskunèsis* was publicly debated, during a drinking-party, among a great number of philosophers and nobles, both Macedonian and local. The first speaker was Anaxarchus—a primacy which probably reflects the authoritative position he enjoyed in Alexander's court. Here, as well as in the previous case, I think that our sources unwillingly allow us to see that Anaxarchus used, as a matter of fact, a way of pleading *pro* which looks exactly like a second-order way of pleading *con*. Two distinct arguments are exposed by Arrian (*Anab.* IV 10.5, DK 72A6).

The first argument reads as follows. It is much more legitimate (*polu dikaioteron*) to consider Alexander as a God than it is to do so with Dionysos and Herakles, not in view (*mè hoti*) of the number and quality of his deeds, but also because (*alla kai hoti*) Dionysos, being a Theban, had nothing whatsoever to do with the Macedonians; nor did Herakles, being an Argian, have anything to do with them, except through Alexander's family, since Alexander was supposed to be an offspring of Herakles. We can find this *a fortiori* argument strange in at least three respects.

First of all, there is something lame in the structure of the parallel between Alexander on the one hand, Dionysos and Herakles on the other. One would expect something like this: Alexander deserves to be treated as a God, still more than Dionysos and Herakles, *not only* because his deeds are superior to theirs, *but also* because they are not Macedonians. Now, the 'but also' clause is indeed present in the text (*alla kai hoti*), but there is no corresponding 'not only' (which would need *mè monon hoti*): there is just a 'not' (*mè hoti*). Unless you mentally supply the missing 'only', the explicit meaning is rather rude, namely: if Alexander is worthy of divine honours, it is *not* because his deeds are in any way comparable to those of traditional Gods or demi-Gods, but for some other reason. What adds zest to the saying is that in Greek, it is always possible (but of course not necessary) to understand a *monon* ('only') following a negation in this sort of context. It would obviously be rash to suppose that the literal wording of Anaxarchus' speech has been exactly preserved by Arrian, a writer of the second century AD. But we know that Arrian consulted and compared various sources with a critical mind; his model here was, he says, 'the prevailing view about Callisthenes' opposition to Alexander on the subject of *proskunèsis*', i.e. a source favourable to Callisthenes and hostile to Alexander, hence to Anaxarchus. In this kind of source, the symbolic antithesis between Callisthenes and Anaxarchus is likely to have been artfully described, with much stylistic care if not with historical accuracy. If such is the case, we can see in this passage a nice example of what was to become a typically Anaxarchian double-entendre: taken literally, his argument plainly says that Alexander did absolutely nothing worthy of a God; but it could easily be understood in the opposite way.

Secondly: the second branch of the 'not (only) . . . but also' structure is equally paradoxical. The reason why Alexander should be regarded as a God by Macedonians, more than Dionysos and Herakles, is that these latter are not home-made divinities, but imported ones from abroad. A quite narrow conception of divinity indeed: nobody is a God outside the walls of his small city-state. Moreover, it obviously implies that home-made divinities are man-made divinities, whose substantial being is nothing but political; this is exactly how Callisthenes understood Anaxarchus'

speech, in the reply attributed to him by Arrian. The logic of the argument would be to the effect that the Macedonians may consider Alexander as a God if they have good (i.e. political) reasons of doing so, but that these reasons are of no weight at all, as far as other people, Greeks and Barbarians, are concerned. This is really not much, bearing in mind that Alexander was supposed to be, or to want to be, the master of the whole inhabited world.

Thirdly: even in regard to the Macedonians, the argument seems to fail (and why not willingly?) to offer really good reasons for deifying Alexander. If we carefully look at what is said about Herakles, we get, as a matter of fact, something very offensive to Alexander: first, Herakles is a foreigner, so that Macedonians have nothing to do with him; secondly, after all, Herakles has some connexions with the Macedonians, but only to the extent that Alexander's family claims to have him as its ancestor. The implicit conclusion is clear: Alexander may have very good reasons for venerating his own ancestor; but if the Macedonians have no reason to venerate this imported God, what good reason do they have to venerate the royal descendant of this foreigner?

Let us now proceed to Anaxarchus' second argument, as reported by Arrian in the same passage: it also seems to be carefully, if covertly, self-destructive. It tackles more directly the crucial problem of whether it is legitimate to grant Alexander divine honours while he is still living. Yes, it is, Anaxarchus says: given that (in virtue of the former argument) he will certainly be honoured as a God after his death, at least by the Macedonians, it is much more justified to grant him such honours during his life-time, since they will be of no use whatsoever later on. Of no use to whom? Here Arrian's text has *tôi timômenôi*, usually translated as a passive, 'of no use for him who is honoured', i.e. for Alexander. Taken this way, the argument would be rather impious: it means either that Alexander, the supposed God, will not survive his human death, or that he will be a kind of God indeed, but without any concern for human prayers and homage, and that does not amount to much in the context of Greek culture at this time. On the contrary, he could take advantage (a political advantage, of course) of the divine honours bestowed upon him while still living. But I wonder if there is not an intentional ambiguity in the participle *tôi timômenôi*, which could equally well be construed as a middle voice form, i.e. as meaning 'of no use for him who is paying honour'. In this case, Anaxarchus would implicitly tell the Macedonians: don't waste your time, and worship the future God at once, so long as he is still living and able to be useful for you. The important thing is not in the least to recognize any divine nature in Alexander, but to make openly

a god out of him, in order to give him still more power—and to make him all the more indebted, hence beneficial, to his subjects.²⁹

If we put together all this information, and indulge in a little bit of extrapolation, perhaps we could say that Anaxarchus' attitude towards Alexander had something Shakespearian in it, as I hinted at when evoking the figure of a king's fool. In the long love-and-hate story of philosophers and kings (or tyrants), he deserves a special place. With Alexander, the Greek culture generated a new type of ruler, which was to serve as an example for centuries. One characteristic feature of this new type of ruler, among many, is to be surrounded with an intelligentsia, theoretically appointed for providing the ruler with brilliant illustrations and ideological justifications. What I find remarkable is that, as soon as this new role of domestic philosopher was designed, a way of undermining the enterprise of domestication, by a cunning mixture of prudence and boldness, was also discovered, and at once impersonated in the figure of Anaxarchus. To what extent the historical Anaxarchus was true to the type, we are not in a position to say. But we can at least see that the type itself was to prove enduring and time-proof as an answer to a type of situation which occurred again and again. Later on, this new role was made an institution in the form of King's fool; still later, it finds an expression in satirical papers, political jokes, ambiguous sayings and writings,³⁰ and so many other devices and various forms of what Jean Cocteau once called the art of 'knowing how far you can go too far'. It is a useful, difficult and dangerous role: if you go beyond the limit (beyond what Anaxarchus himself called

²⁹ In some splendid pages of *Les sceptiques grecs* (42 ff.), Victor Brochard describes the devastating effects of this affair. Let me quote at least the beginning of this passage, which directly echoes the main trend of the present paper: 'It is well-known how reluctantly the Greeks, and above all the philosophers [here Brochard adds, obviously under pressure of the common tradition: "Anaxarchus excepted"], judged Alexander when he fancied to declare himself as a son of Zeus. Callisthenes lost his life in the story. The survivors had to resign themselves, and keep their reflections for themselves. But they had seen how a god is made'. In the following pages, Brochard reports how Alexander's successors imitated him in this respect. What was said by the Athenians to Demetrius Poliorcetes, this monstrous caricature of Alexander ('What Demetrius orders is pious in respect to the Gods and just in respect to the men', Plut. *V. Demetr.* 24) looks just like a summary of Anaxarchus' speech to Alexander after Cleitus' murder. Cf. also the Athenians' address to Demetrius (Athen. VI 63): 'The other Gods are too far away, or too deaf; either they are not, or they do not care for us. But we can see you; you are not an image made of wood or stone, but a body made of flesh and blood' (quoted by Léon Brunschvicg, *Le progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale*, I, p. 44).

³⁰ A French court of justice has recently absolved a professional humorist, accused of defamation by a politician, with the following argument: 'At every time, the fool plays an eminent and salutary part in the society, which is exerted, legitimately in matter of principle, to the detriment of mighty and public persons, who are as well-known as their opinions are. He takes part, in his own way, in the defence of liberties' (*Le Monde*, 11 January 1992).

the ‘measures of opportunity’), you will be punished at once by the political power, but you will possibly be extolled by posterity; if you stay behind this limit, you will escape the immediate danger, but you run the risk of getting a bad reputation for centuries. Anaxarchus was both happy enough, and unhappy enough, to benefit both ways and to suffer both ways.

Alexander had, in fact, accepted Anaxarchus’ subtle *parrhèsia* with much equanimity. Not so with the tyrant Nicocreon. As I have already mentioned, at some time after Alexander’s death, Anaxarchus accidentally fell into the hands of this tyrant of Cyprus, who had hated him for years. The only explanation we have for this inexhaustible hatred is that Anaxarchus, at Alexander’s table, had once made a very elaborate joke, reported by several sources, the meaning of which has been once and for all explained by Paul Bernard (cf. n. 24 above). Here is Diogenes Laertius’ version: ‘He made an enemy of Nicocreon, tyrant of Cyprus. Once at a banquet, when asked by Alexander how he liked the feast, he is said to have answered: “Everything, O king, is magnificent; there is only one thing lacking, that the head of some satrap should be served up at table”. This was a hit at Nicocreon, who never forgot it’. Details apart (there is a pun on *kephalè*, ‘head’, which is also the name of a succulent fish), the gist of this joke was to advise the king, in covert terms, to put Nicocreon to death: as we could say, Anaxarchus was asking for heads. No doubt this was not the beginning of the story: obviously Anaxarchus would not have given this piece of advice to Alexander without some solid hostility already holding between Nicocreon and himself. Nicocreon’s revenge was awful. Anaxarchus was put into a mortar, and pounded to death with iron pestles. His behaviour in this circumstance was repeatedly described, by many ancient writers, with the utmost admiration.³¹ He is supposed to have said: ‘Pound the pouch containing Anaxarchus, you are not pounding Anaxarchus himself’. At the end, so the story goes, Nicocreon commanded his tongue to be cut out; but Anaxarchus bit it off himself and spat it at him. This last chapter of the story, admittedly, is especially dubious, because exactly the same episode was told about Zeno of Elea, in his dealings with another tyrant, whose identity is disputed (Diog. Laert. IX 26–27); as is well-known, this sort of erratic anecdote is common in Diogenes Laertius. Since Anaxarchus was often associated with Zeno as an example of a philosopher unjustly put to death (cf. n. 11 above), it is not surprising to see such or such part of the story occasionally being transposed from one thinker to the other, no doubt in virtue of the

³¹ Cf. n. 11 above.

informant's particular bias.³² On the whole, however, there seems to be some good reasons to think that the very specific description of the torture, and the heroic reply which straightforwardly goes with it, might be left to Anaxarchus, since Anaxarchus mentions his own name in this reply, and nothing of the kind is attributed to Zeno. This is not the case with the (highly symbolic) story about the tongue: this one, according to Paul Bernard, we can probably drop from the story of Anaxarchus, and leave to Zeno.

Now it only remains for me to substantiate my claim that, among the many paradigms of intellectual structure and philosophical attitude handed down by Greek Antiquity to the Western tradition, the pattern provided by Anaxarchus, let us say the pattern of the cunningly subversive court-philosopher, is still definitely traceable in some works and personalities of our troubled times. I do not claim that it is a terribly attractive model; I just claim that it is a powerful and interesting model. As I have already said, I shall take, in support of this claim, the particular example of Curzio Malaparte.

There are at least four reasons, I think, to mention Malaparte in this context, some of them admittedly impressionistic, but one of them quite definite.

First of all, although I am not particularly fond of comparing ancient characters with modern ones, and of singing the old song *nil novi sub sole*, I think that Malaparte has a lot in common with many ancient Sceptics and Cynics, and especially with Anaxarchus: namely, his intellectual personality, his much disputed reputation, a similar ambiguity in his relationships with mighty people from every side, and many other common features which will emerge more distinctly later on, and which can themselves shed some retrospective light, I think, on the paradoxes of Anaxarchus. Malaparte has been successively, and sometimes simultaneously, a devoted Italian fascist and a victim of the Fascist regime. He followed the German armies in their eastern campaigns, as a journalist, frequenting Nazi dignitaries, and playing with them ironical and sometimes

³² Interestingly enough, Diogenes Laertius notes (IX 27) that Hermippus, unlike his other informants about Zeno's death, says that Zeno was cast into a mortar and beaten to death; in other words, he transfers on Zeno the specific feature usually reported about Anaxarchus' death. No doubt Hermippus thought that Anaxarchus was unworthy of such a noble end (cf. nn. 21 and 26 above).

dangerous games, in a typically Anaxarchian style.³³ He satisfied his hedonistic tastes for luxury, smoking good cigars and drinking good cognac in this disreputable company; but he was also able to live in very hard conditions, and he managed to express a courageous compassion for the victims in the very presence of their murderers. After the war, he was attracted by communism and by anticommunism; he perhaps became converted to Roman catholicism on his death-bed. His biographer, Giordano Bruno Guerri,³⁴ describes him as ‘completely indifferent from the ideological point of view, brisk, sometimes tender-hearted and apologizing for that, cynical without convictions, always witty and entertaining, privately open-minded, generous, disconsolate, letting his doubts and solitude show through’, and again, as a man ‘concerned above all with his own originality, always happy to have proved to himself that he was a free man’: in a word, a strangely Anaxarchian mixture of exhibitionism and good faith, hypocrisy and courage, opportunism and independence.

Secondly, as a writer, as a journalist and memorialist, Malaparte can teach us a lot about ancient historiography. We used to think that the indistinction between fact and fiction, the mutual interplay between historical data and literary models or stereotypes, this well-recognized plague of ancient historiography and biography, was something of which we were free. Malaparte can show us, as through a magnifying glass, how tempting and powerful it still may be to write this way. In his masterpiece and most famous book, *Kaputt*, published in 1943, he reports his memories of the Russian battle-front, of his travels through the occupied countries, of his encounters and talks with German officials and neutral diplomats. The book is based on previous reports which he sent from Russia to Italian newspapers, and which were published after the war in a revised version. In *Kaputt* itself, written in the liberated part of Italy before the end of the

³³ Modern historians have already found opportunities for comparisons between Alexander’s court and the Nazi circles, but they are strangely concerned with Callisthenes, not with Anaxarchus. Plutarch (*V. Alex.* 53) tells that Alexander once asked Callisthenes to improvise first a speech in praise of the Macedonians, and then an accusation of them, which he did with success, but apparently putting much more conviction in the palinody, and thus falling into the trap set for him by Alexander. Commenting upon this Aristotelian exhibition of the opposed powers of rhetoric, L. Pearson, *The lost histories of Alexander the Great*, 1960, p. 24 n 10, quotes L. P. Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries*, 1947, p. 16: ‘A German friend told me of attending a party at which Goebbels amused all present by successively delivering a speech on behalf of the restoration of the monarchy, the re-establishment of the Weimar Republic, the introduction of Communism in the German Reich, and, finally, on behalf of National Socialism’. In this case as in the previous one, the last section of the speech was the only one to be taken seriously.

³⁴ Guerri’s *Malaparte* was published in 1980. I used the French translation published in 1981.

war,³⁵ Malaparte certainly said what he could not say before, because of the censorship. But the book is very far from being an objective report of what he saw and of what happened to him; the literary and dramatic reworking of the data is so deep that Guerri could say that 'almost everything in it is fictitious, although tragically likely'—perhaps a case in which, to quote Aristotle's famous saying, 'poetry is more philosophical than history'.

Thirdly, Malaparte is, I think, one of the most intriguing 'survivors' of our times. He was certainly very far from being a pure hero or a subject for much pity; he enormously exaggerated the persecutions he endured from Mussolini or from Goebbels. But he was not a scoundrel either; in many circumstances he proved himself fearless and did not shirk danger. A very ambiguous man, he was fully conscious of the significance of survival in a dirty world. In one of the most moving passages of *Kaputt*, he reports that a poor old Jewish man asked him to try and do something for preventing an imminent pogrom in the Rumanian city of Jassy. 'I am no longer used to act', he says he answered; 'after twenty years of slavery, we don't know any more how to act, how to take any responsibility. Like all Italians, I too have a broken backbone. For twenty years, we have used up all our energy in order to survive. We are no longer good at anything. Perhaps you would like me to sacrifice myself uselessly, in order to defend the Jews of Jassy? If I was able to do that, I would have already gotten killed on an Italian piazza, in order to defend the Italians'.

But there is also a fourth and much more precise reason for mentioning Malaparte in the present context. He had been given a strong classical culture, which he did not usually display in his written work;³⁶ but there is an exception, namely a short paper, entitled *Ritratto di Pirrone* ('A Portrait of Pyrrho'), which he published in the first issue of an Italian journal, *Pegaso*, in January 1929. This paper is a fascinating piece: more

³⁵ Malaparte has told a highly romantic story about how he wrote *Kaputt* and cared for putting the manuscript into safe hands. According to Guerri, this story is totally invented. Such an advertising novel is far from being a novelty: we have only to remember the famous story about Aristotle's manuscripts, kept in a cave and miraculously dug up some centuries after Aristotle's death.

³⁶ However, his interest in what Aristotle describes as the old paradoxes raised by the *phusis-nomos* antithesis (*Soph.el.* 173a7–10), famously illustrated by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* (482e–484c), is shown by a short poem written in 1928, which Guerri has printed as an exergue to his biography, and in which Malaparte designates himself through the nickname of 'the Architalian':

The Architalian does not care
For the law of nature;
He will sometimes correct
The nature of law.

than interesting by its content, and stupendously interesting by its early date. It is not, of course, a scientific paper; it is barely mentioned in the best Italian bibliographies on ancient scepticism; more strangely, it is completely ignored by Guerri in his life of Malaparte, where I had vainly hoped to find some information about its ins and outs. However, it sheds much light, I think, on Malaparte's imagination and personality, and perhaps on some other matters. This paper being little known (except by the most learned of our Italian colleagues) and rather difficult to find, I shall quote some extracts of this striking, imaginative, and of course, highly romantic picture of Anaxachus' pupil and companion.

What on earth could induce Malaparte to write on Pyrrho? A first explicit answer is that he saw in Pyrrho both a historical figure and a symbol, permanent but especially appropriate to our own times. What gives Pyrrho his symbolic meaning is of course his 'Pyrrhonism', which Malaparte describes sometimes in rather vague and traditional terms (like 'doubt' and similar words), sometimes in much more original ones (he is 'the most unhappy hero of our maddest unhappiness', 'a hero for every time, a dramatic character for every climate, a mask for every people', 'a classical Hamlet, utterly decided not to act, with a supreme wisdom, balance, consciousness and judgment'). But the striking thing is that, when trying to depict Pyrrho not as an intemporal symbol, but as a man located in space and time, Malaparte concentrates on the only part of Pyrrho's life about which he can leave a free hand to his imagination, since we have almost no evidence at all in this respect: namely his Oriental travels among Alexander's followers.³⁷ He does not make any use of the fairly abundant evidence concerning Pyrrho's life (quite certainly after his coming back from Asia) in the country neighbourhood of his native city of Elis, an evidence easily available from Diogenes Laertius. He is no more interested in the question of 'Oriental influences' on Pyrrho's thought, and does not even hint at the possibility that Pyrrho's 'scepticism' might have been a result of his expedition and his coming into contact with various figures of Oriental Wise Men.³⁸ What crucially concerns Malaparte is to imagine

³⁷ Malaparte even ignores the only 'piece of information' we have about the relationship between Pyrrho and Alexander, the story concerning the poem written by the former in praise of the latter (cf. n. 2 above); probably he did not know it, given the probable nature of his 'sources'. Quite cleverly, Malaparte takes advantage of this almost total lack of evidence concerning Pyrrho in Asia to depict him as 'silent', 'taciturn', a man 'who never shows up' and 'whom nobody pays attention to': an original *argumentum ex silentio ad silentium*.

³⁸ This Oriental component in the genesis of Pyrrho's thought (through his meetings with the Indian Gymnosophists and the Persian Magi) is distinctly asserted by Diogenes Laertius IX 61, quoting the otherwise unknown Ascanius of Abdera. The question whether it is plausible is still hotly debated nowadays.

Pyrrho (whom he clearly considers as a philosopher already completely self-conscious and in possession of his distinctive ideas when embarking on the Alexander expedition) coming to test his own tragical wisdom by approaching two decisive touchstones: power and war. In Malaparte's *Ritratto*, Pyrrho is centrally the man 'who rode the steppes of Asia with Alexander, sick of anxiety, remorse and doubt'.

Here is a long and meaningful sentence, in which this theme is richly developed: 'I cannot imagine his sad smile, his anxiety, his remorse, the fever of his ceaseless doubts, if not in those times and places, in those circumstances, in the turmoil of weapons, in the long leasures on the river banks, in the brilliant company of princes, officers, courtesans, philosophers, epebes, in this wonderful journey in search of an undiscoverable land, towards the conquest of some elusive kingdom. Huge deserts, deep forests, sparkling cities, dreadful armies of black people, of elephants, of wild beasts, of war-machines and strange animals, fabulous spectacles, jousts, sieges, tumults, orgies, triumphs, a whole unexplored world, a wealthy civilization, unknown men, heroes and gods. The hero of this fable is not Alexander, but Pyrrho, this silent and sad philosopher, who never shows up, whom nobody pays attention to, who suffers from his ceaseless doubt, who can never believe in what takes place right under his eyes, who attends the orgies, the battles, the slaughters, the burnings, and who smiles over what he is seeing. Who could understand Alexander's heroism, without thinking of the continual presence, unavoidable and fatal, of this taciturn and patient philosopher, who darkened with the shadow of his doubt the splendor of the rewards, enterprises, foolish and cruel acts of the Macedonian king?'

Malaparte also knows that Pyrrho came back from Asia, and he looks at him in terms of survival; but here his imagination strangely cools down, and he offers only vague, brief and disconcertingly inconsistent commonplaces: 'The drama, he writes, did not come to an end with the hero's [i.e. Alexander's] death, since Pyrrho survived Alexander: adventures, wounds, glories did not make him bend; he remained unperturbed through the great turmoil. He is the first layman of ancient Greece, the prophet of Platonic reason, but anxious and scornful; he lacks the comfort of any persuasion'. Pyrrho, after Alexander's death, is but the wreck of his former self, and visibly he does not interest Malaparte any more.

He is much more excited by the supposed reasons why Pyrrho decided to follow Alexander: not for glory's sake, he says, but rather 'with the secret hope of reaching the last limits of the earth, and to leave them behind, as well as to leave time behind'. Perhaps Malaparte here is thinking of Pyrrho's memorable saying (in Diog. Laert. IX 66): 'it is not easy entirely to strip oneself of human condition'? In any case, he describes

Pyrrho's nature as 'of a prophetic kind'. And here is the brilliant coda of the paper, once more illuminated by the torches of war and cruelty: 'If you want to imagine Pyrrho as a living man, to know the secret of his anxiety, of his sadness, of his disconsolate smile, of his taciturn way of bearing witness right in the middle of the crash of weapons, of the tumult of orgies, you have only to recall his naturally prophetic disposition, his tedium of the time and place and climate in which he was constrained to live, bearing, like the Sibyls, the nostalgia of things to come'.

When I first read this paper, my immediate reaction was to think that Malaparte himself was endowed with this prophetic nature he is here attributing to Pyrrho. For any reader of *Kaputt*, the description of the expedition of Alexander and Pyrrho's attitudes in front of it in the *Ritratto di Pirrone*, published in 1929, is exactly and amazingly superposable, in all its details, to the description of the campaign of Russia and Malaparte's own attitudes in front of the succession of events and spectacles he then attended to. Suppose we do not know the exact date of the Pyrrho paper (as is so often the case with ancient documents): we would be almost irresistibly tempted to say that this paper was quite certainly written after World War II, and that Malaparte there moulded his portrait of Pyrrho in reference to, and in terms of, his own experience during the war.

Here is certainly a lesson in store for us, which directly bears on the second aspect of survival I am here interested in, namely the survival of information. The facts of the matter here are such that, if we had not independent information about the chronology of the relevant works, the most plausible and economical way of accounting for these facts would be to suppose that the *Ritratto di Pirrone* is an after-effect of the Russian experiences of the author; many of our historical inferences, I am afraid, exactly follow this sort of line, and they are easily accepted as the best possible way of 'saving the phenomena'. But in this case, we happen to know the dates, and we must try to explain the strange affinity between the two texts published in 1929 and 1943 in some other and much more complicated way. This is not to say that we should systematically prefer the *lectio* historically *difficilior* when dealing with this sort of situation; but it may be a helpful warning that what presents itself as the best possible explanation could turn out to be no more than a *lectio* historically *facilior*. How is it possible to understand that in his *Ritratto di Pirrone*, Malaparte has described beforehand, with an astonishing accuracy, what his own attitude was to be, as described in *Kaputt*, some twelve years later, when following another army, in another Eastern expedition, similarly, and still more, full of sound and fury, of orgies, battles, burnings and slaughters?

Fairly obviously, Malaparte has projected himself, and his own image of the intellectual in a stormy and cruel world, in his 1929 paper (cf. his

significant phrase: Pyrrho, 'a mask for every people'); twelve years later, when giving a shape, possibly to his new experiences, and in any case to his written reports of them, he relies on a self-projective model which he has carried within himself for years and years. Without going into the enormous problems of how time, action and narration interfere in human experience, we can at least extract from the Malaparte example that a philosophical or literary scheme (or let us say *topos*, since this ancient notion is often used in modern accounts of ancient biographical and doxographical reports) may well inhabit, not only the mind of a narrator when he claims to report past actions and events, but also the mind of a historical agent himself, when he acts out his dominant patterns, and eventually undertakes to report his actions and attitudes. The back and forth interactions between imagination and experience, fact and fiction, history and legend, are such that, in the case of Malaparte as well as in the case of ancient historians and biographers, it would be rash to ask the rough question: is what you are saying fact or fiction? Human life often is like fiction, not necessarily because it has been arbitrarily distorted in the narrative account given of it after the event, but also because human imagination is a component of the way human life is lived, and (simultaneously or successively) described to oneself and to others.

But now, what about Anaxarchus? After all, Malaparte wrote on Pyrrho, not on Anaxarchus, who is barely mentioned in his Pyrrho paper. As an answer to this question, my own guess would be that if Pyrrho is for him 'a mask for every people', Anaxarchus is a mask behind this mask—a mask he did not make use of, because it had the drawback of being much too little-known, and perhaps also of being too transparent. Although he does not quote any source in his Pyrrho paper, whether ancient or modern, he certainly read at least Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, and possibly also Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Pyrrho*; and he could not miss the many mentions of Anaxarchus which they include. I strongly suspect that, in order to give substance to his portrait of Pyrrho, Malaparte borrowed more than one feature from Anaxarchus; he could feel entitled to do so by the close relationships between the two philosophers. If he unexpectedly concentrates on the Asiatic period of Pyrrho's life, as noticed above, it is quite probably because, in this very period, Pyrrho and Anaxarchus were living together, so that one might suppose that their attitudes and reactions were similar, and easily transfer what we read about one of them to the other.

I think I can document this claim by some particular examples. For instance, Malaparte, when describing Pyrrho, often speaks of 'anxiety', 'remorse' or 'despair'. Where does this come from? What does he know about Pyrrho's psychological attitudes and reactions? As far as I can see,

there is no trace of anything like these features in the evidence concerning Pyrrho. On the contrary, the disposition for which he became famous is variously described as complete indifference (*adiaphoria*), tranquillity (*ataraxia*), mildness (*praotès*), and even complete insensibility (*apatheia*). What on earth induced Malaparte to credit him with so vastly different attitudes and features of character? We could of course suppose that it is a matter of pure self-projection, without any textual basis whatsoever. But let us remember the story, already mentioned above, about the Indian blaming Anaxarchus for ‘dancing attendance on kings in their courts’, and the devastating impression made on Pyrrho by this critical remark: if we make one person out of two, Anaxarchus who is the target of the blame, and Pyrrho who draws the appropriate conclusions from it, then we get exactly what we need, namely the ‘anxiety’, ‘remorse’ and ‘despair’ fictitiously attributed by Malaparte to Pyrrho himself.

A further example. When Malaparte says that Pyrrho ‘could never believe in what was taking place right under his eyes’, and depicts him as ‘a classical Hamlet’, one is reminded not so much of Pyrrho as of the famous, strikingly Shakespearian saying, which Sextus attributes both to Anaxarchus and to the Cynic Monimus (cf. n. 15 above). ‘A stage painting (*skènographia*), resembling the impressions experienced in sleep or madness’: here again, whether this is or not a matter of coincidence, every reader of *Kaputt* will unmistakably admit that the three notions of dream, madness and theatrical unreality very aptly sum up the general atmosphere of the book.³⁹

Let us ask a last question. Did Malaparte read any scholarly literature about Pyrrho and the circle of Alexander’s court-philosophers, which could contribute to his knowledge of the figure of Anaxarchus? There is no clear evidence of it in his Pyrrho paper. Nevertheless, the question could be raised, in relation to a brilliant paper published by Theodor Gomperz about Anaxarchus and Callisthenes, a paper which, for once, tries to rehabilitate Anaxarchus without speaking badly of Callisthenes, that is to say, to break with the traditional antithesis between the two

³⁹ I relegate to a note one more detail, which has possibly less weight. Malaparte speaks of Pyrrho’s supposed ‘tedium of the time and place and climate in which he was constrained to live’. I cannot see any evidence for this, whether direct or indirect, in the biographical data about Pyrrho. But the mention of ‘climate’ could very well be a faint echo of a discussion between Callisthenes and Anaxarchus, reported by Plutarch (*V. Alex.* 52), the subject of which was a comparison between the climate in Greece and in Asia. Contradicting Callisthenes in this debate, as usual, Anaxarchus took a paradoxical position, puzzlingly holding that winter in Asia was less cold than in Greece, while wrapping himself in no less than three blankets. Whatever might have been the hidden meaning of this climatological paradox (a flattering allusion to Alexander’s solar personality or ascendancy?), the anecdote could well be the remote origin of Malaparte’s strange remark.

philosophers. This paper was published in 1877, in a Festschrift volume in honour of Mommsen (cf. the references in n. 26 above). Judging from the fortune of a suggestion it contains about the meaning of ancient anecdotes, this paper might have been more widely read than we could expect from its location and origin: for many people repeat, in the same or similar terms, what Gomperz here says (adapting to his own ends a famous statement by Aristotle, and also certainly remembering the beginning of Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, cf. n. 5 above), namely that ancient anecdotes often are 'more philosophical than history'.⁴⁰ In addition to that, there are at least two reasons for saying something about this paper in the present context.

First, there is no way of proving or disproving that Malaparte heard of this paper, whether directly or indirectly. That he heard of it is not altogether unlikely: I suppose that Mommsen, as an historian of ancient Rome, was rather well-known in Italy at the beginning of our century. There is at least a point in common between Gomperz' paper on Anaxarchus and Malaparte's paper on Pyrrho, namely that both raise the simple question of why the philosopher they are interested in followed Alexander in his expedition. As far as I know there is no trace of this question, let alone of any answer to it, in the ancient sources concerning philosophers. Gomperz asks himself why Anaxarchus took the opportunity of travelling *bis an die Grenzen der bekannten Welt*, to the limits of the known world; he suggests that he was carried by 'an insatiable, really Humboldtian thirst for knowledge' (a probable allusion to the *polumathiè*, commended by Anaxarchus under certain conditions). Malaparte's answer, concerning Pyrrho's motivations, could obviously not be the same: he consistently treats Pyrrho as a sceptic. He just says that Pyrrho followed Alexander 'with the secret hope of reaching the last limits of the earth'. This is, perhaps, a way of turning Gomperz' question into an answer. But of course, the coincidence bears on a rather trivial point, and nothing can be safely inferred from it.

Secondly, and no doubt more interestingly, we have here a new situation in which, if we were ignorant of the chronology, we would be induced to draw the most wide off the mark conclusions. Gomperz' paper contains the following impressive 'ritratto di Anassarco': 'a nature both as hard as steel and nevertheless elastic, full of strong passions, slumbering

⁴⁰ The famous (and slightly different) idea expressed by Nietzsche, this great reader of Diogenes Laertius ('In philosophical systems which have been refuted, the only thing that can still interest us is the personal element; for that is eternally irrefutable. With three anecdotes one can give a picture of a man: I try to extract three anecdotes from each system, and I ignore the rest') appears in the second Preface (1879) of *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*.

under the lid of a cool self-control, like the flames of the Etna under its snowy cap—a mind both quick to witty repartees, supple and richly informed, such appears the image of this thinker when cleaned of the rusty stains of tradition—a thinker who constitutes a not unimportant link in the chain of philosophical speculation.(. . .) He was admittedly able to live as a courtier, but also to die as a demi-god'. Let us suppose that we do not know, that this portrait was written in 1877, more than twenty years before Malaparte's birth, more than fifty years before his *Ritratto di Pirrone*, and more than sixty years before *Kaputt*. The fact is that it looks strangely like Malaparte, and like the image Malaparte wanted to give of himself, indirectly when describing Pyrrho in his 1929 paper, and directly when he describes himself in *Kaputt*. Once again, if we did not know independently the dates of all this material, we would be tempted to say: Gomperz had obviously read Malaparte's *Ritratto*, perhaps even *Kaputt*, and he had Malaparte in mind when drawing his picture of Anaxarchus. We would even have an 'argument'—not much less good than many of our 'arguments': is not the unexpected allusion to the Etna, which has really nothing to do with the Anaxarchian context, a hint at the 'architalian' writer (cf. n. 36 above), and even at his temporary relegation, by special command of Mussolini, into the volcanic Lipari islands?⁴¹ But once again, we know the dates. So what are we to make of the coincidence?

I shall leave the question open between two alternatives. Either Malaparte did read Gomperz, and then we can suppose that Gomperz' picture of Anaxarchus contributed something of importance to the construction of Malaparte's real and/or ideal personality; hence, that old Anaxarchus contributed, from a very long distance and through very convoluted ways, to give its shape to *Kaputt*, this book which is, in my view, one of the most impressive mirrors of our ruthless times. Or Malaparte did not read Gomperz (the most likely hypothesis, and in any case the most prudent one), and then we can only admire the psychological insight with which, trying to describe a philosopher of the remote past, a scholar like Gomperz anticipated on the characteristics (at least the ideal characteristics) of a writer still to come; in this way the coincidence seems at least to bear witness for the pregnancy of the Anaxarchian human and intellectual pattern, its inner consistency, its capacity for springing up again in roughly comparable circumstances. In either hypothesis, Anaxarchus has been a fairly successful survivor.

⁴¹ Malaparte would probably have been much pleased to learn that Zeno of Elea, when arrested by the tyrant he had plotted to overthrow, 'was cross-examined as to his accomplices and about the arms which he was conveying to Lipara' (Diog. Laert. IX 26).