

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

THE GREEK CONCEPTION OF NATURE¹

SCIENTIFIC speculation among the Greeks began vaguely with Hesiod, became articulate with the Milesians, and culminated in Aristotle's philosophy of nature. The development is both native and continuous. The culture of the Greeks is the spontaneous creation of their own genius. Their views about man and nature and God are the natural products of their own instinctive feelings and attitudes. After the period of the invasions and migrations and mixing of races, the Greeks developed a native cultural consciousness at once genial, responsive and energetic. It is true that the distinction between Greek and barbarian received literary expression only relatively late. Nevertheless, the feeling of cultural solidarity expressed itself very early in their history. Greece was not a geographic term; Greece was where the Greeks were.

With the single exception of the Dionysiac religion, which was most certainly Thracian in origin, I know of no single foreign influence that in any radical way subverted or transformed the native genius of the Greeks. This one exception, however, is of great importance because the Dionysiac and Orphic religions profoundly influenced Greek cosmology and Greek views of the soul. After the epic period, with this one notable exception, Greek life was not subject to any violent upheavals from within or any terrifying invasions from without. Their internal differences enabled them to create a variety of ideas while their cultural homogeneity kept their many-sided speculations within the limits of an integrated racial consciousness. This is amazing when we re-

¹ Address of the President of the Western Division of the American Philosophical Association, delivered before the joint session of the Eastern, Pacific and Western Divisions held at the University of Chicago, September 6-9, 1933.