

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

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### THE MEANING OF *φύσις* IN THE GREEK PHYSIOLOGERS.

THE pre-Socratic cosmologists from Thales to Archelaus were, as is generally known, called by Plato, Aristotle, and the doxographers, 'physical' philosophers; and the principal writings of many of them, beginning with Anaximander, seem to have been treatises *περὶ φύσεως*, 'concerning Nature.' This expression we may take, then, as indicating the primary and most significant subject of their inquiry; and the beginning of wisdom in the study of Greek philosophy must evidently consist in a correct apprehension of the meaning of *φύσις* in pre-Socratic technical usage. Unfortunately, none of the extant fragments of the physiologists offer any direct definition of the term; indeed, it occurs rather infrequently in them. And the doxographers in describing the pre-Socratic theories commonly substitute for the term *φύσις* the (in its technical sense) purely Aristotelian word *ἀρχή*, 'first principle.' In this absence of decisive direct evidence, two conflicting opinions have recently been held as to the original philosophical meaning of the term. Burnet, who appears to have been the first to insist emphatically upon the importance of a correct understanding of the word as the prime precondition to any sound interpretation of the earliest Greek philosophy and science, regards it as signifying "the primary and permanent substance." "The scientific men of Miletos," he writes, "asked what things really are *now*. The great principle which underlies all the speculation of the early cosmologists, though it is first explicitly laid down by Parmenides, is that nothing comes into being out of nothing, and nothing passes away into nothing. They saw, however, that particular