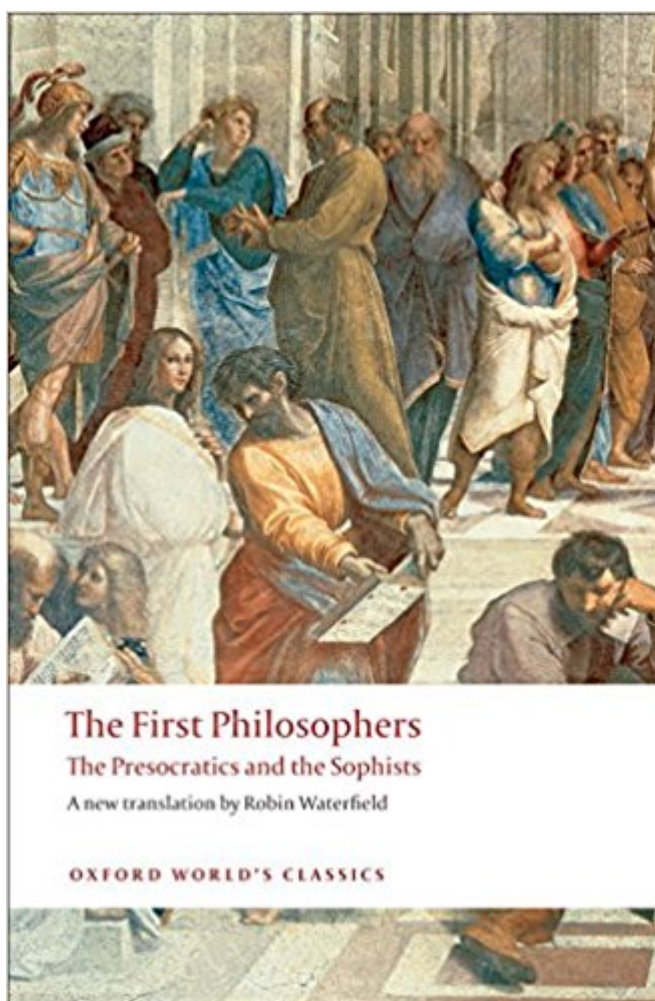


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# The First Philosophers: The Presocratics And Sophists (Oxford World's Classics)



## Synopsis

Aristotle said that philosophy begins with wonder, and the first Western philosophers developed theories of the world which express simultaneously their sense of wonder and their intuition that the world should be comprehensible. But their enterprise was by no means limited to this proto-scientific task. Through, for instance, Heraclitus' enigmatic sayings, the poetry of Parmenides and Empedocles, and Zeno's paradoxes, the Western world was introduced to metaphysics, rationalist theology, ethics, and logic, by thinkers who often seem to be mystics or shamans as much as philosophers or scientists in the modern mould. And out of the Sophists' reflections on human beings and their place in the world arose an interest in language, and in political, moral, and social philosophy. This volume contains a translation of all the most important fragments of the Presocratics and Sophists, and of the most informative testimonia from ancient sources, supplemented by lucid commentary.

About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Robin Waterfield was commissioning editor at Penguin between 1988-91, and now works as a consultant editor for Collins Harvill, freelance translator, and writer of children's books. His

acclaimed translations of Plato include Philebus (1982), Theaetetus (1987), Early Socratic Dialogues (1987), Republic (1993), and Symposium (1994). He lives in Teddington, Surrey.

As I said before Philosophy!

This book was helpful in getting a general idea of who the presocratic and sophist philosophers were. There are a lot of source texts available so most of the book is Waterfield summarizing the views of the main people that we have some fragments and testimonials of. At this point philosophy wasn't really a systematic field of study, so most of what you learn from this is historical views on the different philosophers, you don't really learn much about their specific positions, if they even had definite ones. In fact, Waterfield mentions that scholars don't often agree on what a given philosopher's view was. That being said I think this book is useful to read to get an idea of the history of philosophy and the general environment that existed at the time and give rise to people like Plato and Aristotle.

Very interesting book

This work is very comprehensive but as with many works on this era, it is difficult to really know what the Presocratics thought because so much of their philosophy is reported by subsequent authors. This is particularly problematic for me because the reports by Plato on the Sophists is tainted by his disdain of this group. This leaves one with a bit of a distorted view of them. The author has done a good job of summarizing the thinking of each philosopher though, and I would recommend the book for those interested in the Presocratics.

Daughter needed for a course as described, showed up fast.

Good

Almost good for the beginner, quite a small letters, I always prefer large print cannot strain my eyes for long time.

I like this book very much and assign it in my introductory classes on ancient philosophy. Waterfield translations are very congenial, and accurate. His commentary is sensible, with just the right amount

of detail for an introduction. The focus is on the fragments and reports of what those early philosophers said, rather than the commentary. I regard this volume as similar in spirit and approach to Barnes' wonderful little book, but better because it has less of a "view" to put forward. Barnes is a very strong intellect, of course, and he cannot but take strong positions. Some people like that, of course: I'd rather take the strong positions myself, in lectures. ;-) I find McKirahan's translations and commentary both a bit clumsy, in the Hackett alternative. His commentary is too intrusive, too: the "presocratics" have not enough chance to speak for themselves. Yes, of course, everyone should be directed to Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, but their minimalism and "positivism", separating sharply sparse evidence from theory, will hardly attract anyone to the "presocratics." If that is your only book, you can hardly see why those early philosophers are so important. I studied only Kirk and Raven at first, and it wasn't until many years later, when I read Popper on the "presocratics," that I understood -- "ah, now I see!"

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