
A Return to the Greek Thinkers in Karl Popper's Philosophy: Toward Grounding Critical Rationalism

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Abstract :

This article aims to interrogate the phenomenon of the "return" to the philosophy of pre-Socratic thinkers—a trend that has gained notable and growing attention in contemporary philosophical studies—and to explore its significance within the project of the modern philosopher and epistemologist Karl Popper. A close reading of Popper's texts reveals a conscious revival of the pioneering Ionian experience, drawing inspiration from the philosophical tradition that was first successfully established in the history of Western thought. Popper insists on the relevance of this tradition today and its embodiment in contemporary scientific practice. This perspective underpins the foundations of his critical debates against the major theses of logical positivism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Philosophical discourse- particularly in its modern and contemporary phases- has witnessed a striking phenomenon: the “return,” whether to the philosophy of a specific thinker or to that of a particular historical era. This movement of return often implies an underlying awareness that a conceptual rupture or distortion has occurred within certain historical or interpretive contexts, necessitating a process of reassessment and repair. Such efforts aim to revive or reengage with what has been marginalized or misinterpreted due to flawed understanding or corrupted interpretation. Hence, the idea of return becomes crucial, as it calls for a renewed engagement with earlier philosophical thought and the building of rich bridges of dialogue and intercultural exchange- allowing contemporary thought to refresh its conceptual tools and test their relevance.

Yet, some bold attempts in contemporary philosophy have taken upon themselves the task of returning to the very beginnings of Greek philosophy. This refers to the philosophies of the earliest Greek thinkers, who, in truth, left behind only scattered fragments or concise texts preserved and studied by a select group of Hellenistic scholars. Undoubtedly, engaging with these texts from the standpoint of “return” imposes a particular interpretive framework, rendering such philosophical revisitations governed by specific intellectual intentions.

This is precisely the inquiry we seek to undertake in this article- by examining the purpose that led the philosopher and epistemologist Karl Popper to one of the most profound engagements, in our view, with the thought of the Ionian school

and its pioneering philosophical and scientific contributions to the trajectory of Western intellectual history. We have employed an analytical approach in reading Popper's texts related to this subject, in order to identify the methodological and philosophical features that distinguish his project, and to explore how these features reflect upon the foundational concepts and frameworks that shape his epistemology.

2. The Meaning of "Return" and Its Philosophical Implications

Jean Beaufret, in his introduction to the French translation of *Le Poème de Parménide*, drew attention to a prevailing feature in contemporary French philosophical studies: their relative neglect of engagement with pre-Socratic philosophers and their disregard for critically examining the foundational texts of that philosophical era. These texts contain powerful intellectual intuitions and metaphysical questions that have shaped the destiny of Western philosophy—its inquiries, interpretations, and even its modes of philosophizing, whose concepts and problems still orbit within their gravitational field. In response to this significant gap, Beaufret welcomed the publication of the French translation as a corrective gesture and an attempt to delve into the depths of pre-Socratic thought. This body of thought, as Nietzsche described it, remains "the deepest buried among all Greek temples"¹.

In contrast to French thought on this particular issue, German philosophy appears to maintain a profound connection with Greek philosophy as a whole, and especially with the thought preceding the Socratic era. Perhaps the most prominent contemporary German philosopher who regarded philosophy in its entirety as an exclusively Greek affair is Martin Heidegger. Heidegger persistently revisited the propositions of Greek philosophy, particularly the fragments attributed to the pre-

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Socratic thinkers—most notably Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides—whom he considered the most worthy of attention and philosophical dignity. This preference stems from the original metaphysical and intellectual experiences embedded in their thought, and from the inspiration drawn from their visions—visions that were later obscured by the Latin translation of the Greek philosophical lexicon and by layers of accumulated interpretation. These layers, through non-equivalent concepts, veiled the true meanings of the foundational philosophical texts. Once these texts are liberated from corrupted interpretations, they reveal pioneering intellectual intuitions and philosophical experiences whose original significance must be grasped by today's philosopher. Only then can philosophical inquiry be resumed according to its authentic Greek conditions—for philosophy, Heidegger insists, is either Greek or it is not philosophy at all.

In truth, the thesis of Greek originality- which implicitly devalues not only Greek thought and culture but also all alternative intellectual traditions (especially those dismissed by Enlightenment thought as eras of darkness and backwardness, such as the medieval period in its Jewish, Christian, and Islamic expressions)- is a thesis that predates Heidegger. It is rooted in a broader German tradition established through the convergence of German Idealism and Romanticism, both of which endeavored to forge pathways linking German thought to the Greeks². This tradition reinforced the conviction that there exists a profound kinship between the German people and the Greeks, and that contemporary German philosophy must fulfill this legacy by undertaking a direct passage to the Greeks, bypassing the Latin-Roman intermediary.

While Heidegger's engagement with the Greek philosophical heritage is undoubtedly unique- both in its thesis,

argumentative style, and approach to major philosophical concepts and historical turning points- it is not free, in principle, from ideological considerations. His central justification for critiquing “Roman philosophy” lies in its alleged impoverishment of the original Greek philosophical experience of Being. According to Heidegger, this tradition stripped Greek thought of its rich primordial content and deeply distorted its meanings, resulting in a severance from its authentic roots³. However, this justification- despite its epistemological significance and hermeneutic sophistication- must be situated within a historical context marked by the rising tide of Germanic nationalist discourse, which advocated for the primacy of the German people⁴. This ideological backdrop diminishes the philosophical integrity of Heidegger’s argument, as it becomes entangled with explicit ideological motives. Moreover, if one sets aside this ideological entanglement, the interpretive critique offered by Taha Abderrahmane presents a compelling counterpoint. He argues that Heidegger’s attempt at a direct “return” to the Greeks is, in fact, a calculated strategy to counter what he calls a contemporary program of “Judaization” of philosophy⁵. Abderrahmane’s unique perspective may have drawn inspiration from a remark by philosopher Paul Ricoeur⁶, who criticized Heidegger for ignoring the biblical-Jewish component in the foundations of Western philosophy. This critique was further developed by researcher Marlène Zarader, who endeavored to uncover the Hebraic sources within Heidegger’s own thought⁷.

While the theme of “returning to the Greeks” may not be surprising when it appears in the works of major philosophers and metaphysicians—often driven by a wide array of motives and intellectual concerns—its presence in the thought of a contemporary epistemologist like Karl Popper, whose

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engagement with it is notably free from ideological preoccupations, invites a deeper inquiry. What prompted Popper, too, to revisit the pre-Socratic thinkers? And from what perspective did he approach this return and operate within its scope?

What provokes this question is a kind of paradox that stirs both curiosity and astonishment. Popper is a philosopher of science with a clearly defined epistemological orientation. His scientific training, one might assume, would exempt him from entertaining a gesture akin to Heidegger's cherished "step backward." After all, the trajectory of scientific inquiry is typically one of progression, avoiding any form of regression or backward movement. Whether one adopts Gaston Bachelard's model of epistemological rupture—which views the history of science as a history of errors, with each decisive development requiring a break from inherited obstacles—or embraces the model of continuity, which sees the history of science as a linear evolution where each new development builds upon and transcends the previous, the scientific rationale for returning to an earlier stage of thought seems tenuous at best.

How, then, can one justify a return to a remote intellectual and scientific past? Such a gesture appears puzzling and compels the reader of Popper's epistemological texts to clarify what "return" to the pre-Socratic philosophers truly means, and what conceptual framework it should be understood within.

Is this return, as some might describe it in the cases of Heidegger or Nietzsche, a nostalgic yearning for a lost innocence—a moment the philosopher seeks to embody and recover for its own sake, believing that grasping its intellectual and scientific concerns might provide insights and intuitions still capable of invigorating the scientific spirit and propelling it toward further development, even helping it penetrate the

impasses and unknowns that contemporary research struggles to overcome?

Or is this return rather an inspiration drawn from a scientific or intellectual model that has proven its theoretical efficacy in stimulating scientific activity and unlocking the full range of possibilities needed to overcome the dilemmas posed by scientific practice—whether those dilemmas are contextual or circumstantial?

In the following sections of this study, we aim to demonstrate—based on the available texts of philosopher Karl Popper—that the intellectual concern which led him to engage in this philosophical venture responds, in our view, to a hermeneutic imperative distinct from the two previously mentioned considerations. This can be broadly formulated as follows: Popper's engagement with issues in contemporary philosophy of science was fundamentally driven by a concern for grounding—that is, grounding a critical and rational approach to scientific and philosophical problems.

His return to interrogating foundational sources and drawing upon their modes of addressing scientific and philosophical challenges represents a hermeneutic orientation toward a formative intellectual experience—one that succeeded in establishing the first tradition of critical rationalism in Western civilization. From this perspective, Popper's return to the Ionian heritage is not merely a nostalgic gesture, but rather a deliberate interpretive decision to consciously re-enter the horizon of that tradition and to assess the distortions it has undergone throughout the various phases of Western intellectual history.

3. Karl Popper in the Context of Logical Positivist Epistemology

It may be difficult for readers of Popper's texts to fully

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appreciate the innovative dimensions of his epistemology if they overlook its polemical context—specifically, the intellectual environment in which it emerged and developed in relation to the doctrines of logical positivism. Popper maintained close personal relationships and shared scientific and philosophical interests with several leading figures of the logical positivist movement. Some commentators have even described his relationship with its members using the language of “dissidence”⁸, a term that suggests a high degree of intellectual tension, bordering on outright conflict. In truth, Popper was never formally affiliated with the Vienna Circle or the logical positivist school, so the term “schism” may not strictly apply. However, the intensity of his critiques—beginning with his earliest epistemological works⁹ created the impression that Popper’s epistemology was shaped and defined within the intellectual climate of logical positivism, even if this shaping occurred through principled opposition.

While the scope of this article does not permit a detailed exposition of the central doctrines of logical positivism that Popper actively contested, it is necessary to highlight two foundational theses of the movement that play a critical role in Popper’s counterarguments.

The first thesis concerns the judgment that metaphysics—and all forms of philosophical and speculative discourse—are devoid of meaning. Consequently, any metaphysical discourse, or any discourse structurally akin to it, is considered closer to poor literature than to rigorous philosophical expression. Given this stance, members of the logical positivist movement concluded that metaphysics must be excluded from the domain of meaningful discourse. If the term “philosophy,” with its venerable history, is to retain any precise significance, it must refer solely to the analytical activity of clarifying scientific language—and nothing beyond that¹⁰. This is because, according

to logical positivism, the only valid form of human knowledge is scientific knowledge, which deals with facts through empirical investigation, leaving no room for speculative considerations. Since reality is entirely and exclusively accessible through scientific practice and its specialized methodologies for uncovering the laws that govern it, philosophy, in principle, cannot meaningfully speak about this reality. In this regard, Carnap explicitly states: “What remains for philosophy is the method of logical analysis, since statements that assert something belong to the domain of empirical science”¹¹.

Thus, the way to eliminate the persistent metaphysical problems that have accumulated over centuries is to boldly dismiss them altogether. This methodological decision rests on the premise that only problems grounded in observable, analyzable facts are legitimate. Metaphysical and speculative judgments, by contrast, are false problems—that is, they are not problems in themselves, but merely meaningless verbal formulations¹², even if they are grammatically correct. A rigorous logical analysis is sufficient to reveal their semantic emptiness and expose them as sequences of words that refer to nothing. Accordingly, the sole function of philosophy becomes the eradication of false problems and their expulsion from the realm of meaningful discourse—not the futile effort to find solutions for them, since such solutions do not and cannot exist.

The second thesis advanced by logical positivism is the elevation of the concept of verification to the status of a criterion of meaning. This implies that, aside from logical and mathematical propositions—whose truth depends on their analytic nature and adherence to the principle of non-contradiction—synthetic statements derive their meaning from the manner in which their truth or falsehood can be verified¹³. As Reichenbach observed, there is a strong link between the issue of

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meaning and the criterion of verification, which leads to the necessity of abandoning metaphysical inquiries that cannot be classified among propositions verifiable as true or false¹⁴. It is also clear that such verification cannot occur without recourse to inductive methodology, which relies on tracking data from direct observation. Observation statements thus become the foundational propositions upon which the entire process of verification rests. Accordingly, the two central theses of logical positivism—namely, the exclusion of metaphysics and the adoption of verification as the criterion of meaning—ultimately converge on a common epistemological root: a reductionist tendency toward basic observation statements, regarded as the solid nucleus to which all meaningful discourse about reality must be reduced.

Because of this conceptual entanglement within logical positivist epistemology, Popper made his critique of inductive methodology a strategic entry point for dismantling its reductionist orientation. Over decades of research, writing, and intellectual activity, Popper consistently rejected induction, arguing that it is an unnecessary procedure for science¹⁵ and that it plays no genuine role in either scientific method or the development of scientific knowledge¹⁶. He even referred to it at times as a myth¹⁷ and issued a decisive judgment that no such thing as inductive logic exists¹⁸.

To further challenge the most distinctive and influential thesis of logical positivism, Popper introduced the concept of falsifiability—not as a criterion of meaning, but as a criterion of scientific status. This distinction is crucial for understanding the points of contention between the two camps and the fundamental divergence of Popper's epistemology from logical positivism.

It is important to note that Popper's concern was never with the problem of meaning per se, but with the demarcation

between science and non-science. Thus, falsifiability, or the logical possibility of refutation, serves as a criterion for the scientific legitimacy of propositions. Since induction lacks logical and methodological validity in Popper's view, relying on it to verify scientific statements leads to conceptual corruption. Moreover, the verification criterion fails to distinguish between science and pseudoscience, as it does not grasp the essential scientific character of propositions and instead becomes entangled in the sterile problem of meaning—a problem that only grows more convoluted without yielding any fruitful resolution. Indeed, the verification criterion cannot be applied to many scientific statements and theoretical systems. Should we then exclude them from the domain of science simply because they do not meet the verification requirements set by logical positivism?

Perhaps the most significant implication of the verification criterion of meaning—once we recognize the flawed attempt to abolish metaphysics and exclude it without acknowledging its profound importance and effectiveness in shaping scientific imagination and theory formation—is that natural scientific theories and laws themselves risk being reduced to the status of metaphysical utterances¹⁹. This is due to the practical and technical impossibility of verifying the infinite content of a theory or subjecting it to empirical testing through inductive reasoning, which is itself epistemologically invalid. Scientific laws possess a kind of transcendence over direct observational data in two fundamental ways:

- 1-Universality of scientific judgment, which extends infinitely beyond the scope of what has been or can be observed.
- 2- Judgment or law contains universal terms²⁰.

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Secondly, we must observe that Popper's epistemological project is fundamentally different from that of logical positivism. While Popper is concerned with the problem of the growth and accumulation of scientific knowledge, logical positivism focuses narrowly on the empirical justification of theories and the search for sensory evidence to support their truth.

This distinction is of great significance. It helps explain the deep divergence between the two positions. In fact, one could argue that Popper introduces a new paradigm for scientific theory, wherein the role of empirical observation is radically transformed. Instead of serving as the foundation for constructing and confirming scientific laws, observation becomes merely a moment in the process of testing and attempting to falsify them.

The mechanism of falsification—with its logical and empirical procedures—clearly reveals that Popper's epistemology has decisively abandoned the notion of final and absolute truth in scientific theories, regardless of how many experiments support them. A scientific theory, in Popper's view, is merely a conjecture or hypothesis that has temporarily survived rigorous testing and attempts at falsification. Its resilience at a given time does not guarantee its immunity, as it remains perpetually vulnerable to future refutation²¹. Thus, what confers scientific status upon a theory is not the positivist criterion of verification—which is fundamentally inadequate and concerned with the issue of meaning—but rather its falsifiability in light of stringent tests and emerging empirical data. This approach strips scientific inquiry and epistemological models of the illusion of absolute certainty and undermines the claim to final truth, which is, in reality, another form of dogmatism—one that poses serious harm to the scientific enterprise.

4. Karl Popper and the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: Toward a Philosophical Grounding of his Critical Rationalism

After situating Popper within the framework of contemporary debates on the foundational concepts of scientific practice, the reader may wonder how he could justify a return to the thinkers of the pre-Socratic era. What did he seek in their thought, and what did he strive to uncover that might reinforce his positions—especially in the polemical contexts that pitted him against the epistemologists of the logical positivist school?

Popper's return was not that of a professional historian or a philologist equipped with the methodological and critical tools of classical textual scholarship. He openly admits that his engagement with this period was that of a passionate amateur²², drawn by the richness of its exceptional texts and intellectual experiences. He affirms that non-specialists have every right to engage in thoughtful readings of ancient works, fully aware of the temporal and critical distance that separates them from these texts. Indeed, many masterpieces of ancient literature and thought possess intrinsic aesthetic and intellectual value, and they remain open to anyone who seeks to explore their depths. From this perspective, there is no reason to claim that reading ancient texts is the exclusive domain of experts—just as museums and art galleries welcome the general public, most of whom are not specialists in the arts.

What drew Karl Popper to the early Greek thinkers? In the opening of his essay *Return to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Popper explains that what enticed him was what he called “pure rationality,” which emerged during that era in a form that truly commands admiration. This rationality was not limited to the simplicity of the questions posed or the rigor of

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their treatment; rather, its foundational element was the critical stance inaugurated by the Ionian school—a stance that Popper regarded as a turning point in the intellectual history of humanity²³.

Thales, the head of the Ionian school and one of the Seven Sages of antiquity, left behind fragments and scattered insights. According to Popper, the earliest beginnings of philosophy and science owed little to empirical observation. Instead, they relied on bold intellectual intuitions and speculative reasoning more than on sensory evidence to formulate their cosmological theories and accompanying inquiries into human knowledge. The wonder that gripped the minds of the early Greeks was the very fact of the cosmos—that the universe exists, that humans are part of it, and that understanding oneself and one's destiny depends on grasping the mystery of the greater cosmos that contains us. Thus, ancient Greek inquiry was distinguished by its rational foundation and its effort to construct a discourse about the cosmological structure of the world—what we now recognize as the origins of natural science.

Although Thales' remarkable theory explaining the earth's stability and the occurrence of earthquakes lacked empirical support, it nonetheless drew upon experimental analogies. His claim that water is the origin of all things, or that moisture is the principle of life, led him to envision the earth as a disc floating on water—an idea inspired by the observation of islands surrounded by sea. He thus elevated water to the status of a universal explanatory principle²⁴. The truly decisive moment, however, came with his student Anaximander's alternative explanation of the same phenomenon. Anaximander rejected water as the first principle, arguing that such a principle must be indeterminate; otherwise, it could not account for the emergence of distinct entities. He therefore proposed the concept of the

apeiron—the infinite or boundless. One of his most daring and revolutionary ideas was the claim that the earth is suspended in space without any support, held in place by its equal distance from surrounding celestial bodies. Aristotle later commented on this theory, suggesting that the earth's stability results from its equilibrium and symmetrical positioning relative to other bodies²⁵.

Was it sensory observation that led Anaximander to reject his teacher's views and to revise them through his concept of the infinite?

Here, we are not concerned with the minute details or specific transitions between positions within the Ionian school. What matters to Karl Popper are two fundamental considerations:

The first consideration is that Anaximander's cosmological theory, and the ensuing theory of human knowledge, owe nothing to observation; rather, they appear as a bold intuitive construction that proceeds in an entirely opposite direction to empirical observation²⁶. Rather, it appears to be a bold, intuitive formulation that runs entirely counter to experimental empiricism. Popper is well aware that Anaximander represents, in a sense, the earliest beginnings of science, though not as a scientist by modern standards. He was a thinker whose cosmological inquiries were deeply rooted in abstract metaphysical reflection. It was precisely this theoretical grounding, combined with rational inference, that enabled Anaximander to formulate a theory that nearly anticipated Newtonian ideas about invisible, immaterial forces of gravity²⁷. Popper even speculates that what prevented Anaximander from arriving at the concept of a spherical Earth was his reliance on a sensory-based analogy—one that suggested the Earth was flat, based on empirical observation of islands surrounded by water. Thus, abstract speculation allowed Anaximander to propose a

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highly explanatory theory that later thinkers and scientists would build upon. His intellectual legacy became a foundational condition for groundbreaking scientific advances, notably those of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo.

Popper, in his critiques of classical empiricism and its modern incarnation in logical positivism, never misses an opportunity to highlight the epistemological dangers of reducing scientific systems to direct observational data. He repeatedly asserts that there is no such thing as “pure observation” devoid of theoretical framing. Theory is not only the reference point and starting ground for observation—it is also its “horizon of expectations”²⁸. In discussing the uniqueness of the Ionian school at the dawn of Western intellectual history, Popper uses this opportunity to sharply criticize the Baconian myth and its detrimental impact on scientific practice and epistemological concepts. The Ionian experience teaches us the opposite: for example, Anaximenes—Anaximander’s student—is considered the least revolutionary among the Ionian thinkers, precisely because he lacked philosophical depth and metaphysical intuition. He was, in essence, an empiricist—a man of common sense²⁹. From Popper’s perspective, the Baconian view of science as a cautious, slow progression from observation to theory—structured by inductive reasoning—is a regression from the epistemological achievements of Ionian thought.

The second consideration is no less important than the first—and perhaps even more philosophically significant. Popper believes that the true depth of early Greek philosophy lies in its establishment of a tradition: the tradition of critical discussion³⁰. Popper observes that the concept of schools—along with teaching, training, and the acquisition of theoretical and practical skills—existed in earlier civilizations. We find no reason to dispute this, even if the content and focus of these schools varied.

What they all shared, however, was their nature as monolithic institutions. Their primary aim was to instill a fixed understanding and reinforce the correctness of the doctrine held by the master or founding teacher. These schools developed argumentative frameworks to defend their doctrines from criticism and to preserve their integrity.

Thus, the schools of pre-Greek civilizations were not spaces for free critical inquiry. On the contrary, they were closed institutions, dogmatically orthodox and unidimensional, designed to transmit the teacher's beliefs to future generations within a rigid interpretive framework. Any attempt at renewal or reinterpretation was met with hostility. Knowledge could not emerge from criticism or debate, because such institutions could not accommodate the idea of questioning foundational doctrines. Any such attempt was immediately labeled as heresy or deviation, warranting denunciation and possibly expulsion. This led to schisms, internal conflicts, and even the collapse of the school itself³¹.

Thus, wherever critical inquiry is absent, the possibilities for producing creative thought—whether scientific or philosophical—are nullified. All efforts are then directed toward tracing every idea back to a prior origin and judging it solely on that basis. Any argumentation that takes place within such schools is merely justificatory, aimed at defending the foundational tenets of the doctrine and nothing more.

In contrast, the Greek schools—especially the Ionian school—introduced a truly unique phenomenon in the spiritual history of Western civilization: the establishment of freedom as a condition for all human intellectual production. This idea is profoundly deep and radical, and it was notably emphasized by the German idealist philosophers: Hegel, who interpreted the emergence of philosophy among the Greeks as stemming from

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their recognition that man is free in his essence, and who considered freedom the very core of the Greek spirit³²; and Schelling, who saw the Greeks as the first civilization to dare to think freely and to submit thought to the law of reason³³. Popper did not stray far from this interpretation, though he distinguished himself by linking the concept of freedom to what he called the “emergence of a tradition”³⁴—a tradition that not only permits but actively encourages intellectual and scientific debate, critical engagement between schools of thought, and the generation of knowledge through productive controversy.

What is especially distinctive about the Greeks, as revealed by the Ionian school, is that criticism was practiced within the same school, in an atmosphere of scholarly respect and academic integrity, guided solely by intellectual responsibility and the ethics of scientific inquiry. We witnessed Anaximander refuting the foundational principle of his teacher Thales—possibly in his presence and with his encouragement and admiration—without causing any disruption or schism within the school. It seemed that Thales’ true aim was to cultivate free thinkers, not dogmatic followers, and that the genuine purpose of the school was not to protect any theory or idea, regardless of its author, but to subject it to rigorous critique in accordance with the demands of rationality and the understanding that every theory is vulnerable to refutation at any moment. There is no certainty in the knowledge of mortals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thus, in the trajectory of the Ionian school, we find the major features of Popper’s epistemology:

- A deep appreciation for bold, high-explanatory-power intuitions.

-A proper placement of empirical observation—without elevating it to a status that undermines the creative essence of scientific practice.

-A strong emphasis on the conditions of critical rationality, given their clear impact on the growth and advancement of scientific knowledge.

-A rejection of the illusion that theories can be shielded from all forms of criticism and falsification.

Above all, Popper's tireless effort to re-establish the Ionian tradition within the horizon of contemporary thought reflects his conviction that it still holds enduring intellectual and scientific value, and possesses undeniable philosophical relevance today.

4. CONCLUSION

Karl Popper's grounding of his epistemological concepts in the intellectual experience of the Ionian school and the early Greek thinkers provided his critical rationalism with a robust argumentative framework—one that proved highly effective in his various debates with contemporary epistemological opponents. This grounding enabled him to perceive what others had overlooked.

We conclude this article with a brief comparative remark, without delving into its many ramifications. The French linguist and thinker Ernest Renan, long before Popper, spoke admiringly of what he repeatedly called the "Greek miracle"³⁵. By this phrase, he meant that philosophy, science, literature, and systems of political governance emerged in Greek civilization in a

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manner that defies explanation. Renan, despite his scholarly expertise, saw no issue in describing this phenomenon in such terms, failing to recognize that his characterization was closer to a mystification than a tribute. After all, how can one explain a rational event—such as the birth of philosophy in Greek civilization—using religious language and notions of revelation and inspiration, when the true achievement of Greek philosophy lies precisely in its commitment to reason alone?

This is exactly what Karl Popper did not overlook. He offered a rational explanation, attributing the phenomenon to the establishment of a tradition of free critical debate at the dawn of Western intellectual history. Philosophy was born the moment the student ceased to idolize the teacher, abandoned excessive reverence that hindered independent thought, and dared to challenge and refute his master's views. In that very moment, philosophy emerged—and with it, science, literature, and the arts. No miracle at all: only the courage to falsify, with full responsibility and freedom.

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² Franco Volpi, « Heidegger et la romanité philosophique », *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 2001, n° 3, p. 6.

³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴ M. Heidegger, *Introduction à la métaphysique*, trad. G. Kahn, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, p. 113.

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¹⁹ K. Popper, *Logique de la découverte scientifique*, p. 35.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 433.

²¹ K. Popper, *Les deux problèmes fondamentaux de la théorie de la connaissance*, trad. fr. Ch. Bonnet, 1999, p. 98.

²² K. Popper, *Conjectures et réfutations*, p. 207.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 209.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 210.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 210.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 218.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 225.

³¹ Ibid., p. 226.

³² See Hegel, *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie*, trad. fr. Jean Gibelin, Paris, Gallimard, 2007.

³³ See Schelling, *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, trad. fr. X. Tilliette, Paris, Aubier, 1970.

³⁴ K. Popper, *Conjectures et réfutations*, p. 227.

³⁵ Ernest Renan, *Prière sur l'Acropole*, Paris, Edouard Pelletan, 1899, p. 11.