PART FIVE

ION THE PHILOSOPHER?
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PLAYING THE PYTHAGOREAN: ION’S TRIAGMOS

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Introduction

Was Ion of Chios a philosopher? As so often when one asks a seemingly simple question, the answer turns out to be complicated and—given that in this case the evidence is exiguous—inconclusive on most issues. This explains why my discussion regarding Ion as a philosopher is to a large extent exploratory and speculative. I intend to use other people’s work in the process—in particular the articles by Huxley (1965), West (1985) and Dover (1986), of which the latter two appeared so close in time to each other that they are independent treatments. Nevertheless, my approach differs from all these. I examine Ion’s status as a philosopher, an approach hitherto unexplored, by bringing into play all the evidence and providing a context. How one defines ‘philosopher’, in particular with reference to the early fifth century, where the term is still fairly fluid, is a natural corollary to my investigation. My answer to the question first posed above will be a qualified “yes”, since the evidence suggests that Ion was knowledgeable about the subject, yet perhaps not completely serious while writing about it.

Research into the topic revealed that some of the earlier work (seeking answers to different questions) did not attempt to look for coherence in the surviving philosophical material. I believe that some of Huxley’s speculations are over-confident and potentially misleading; West focuses more on the historical evidence; Dover’s comments are mostly from a literary perspective, analyzing the stylistic features which characterize Ion’s work. Regarding the Triagmos, Dover’s analysis is beyond doubt the most helpful. However, the valuable comments of all three are taken into account.1 Regarding any search for coherence, this will be

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1 Dover’s analysis of the style and literary context remains unchallenged. My arguments are intended to be complementary to Dover and West, both still well worth consulting. The earliest literature has faded from the scholarly debate (see Diehl 1916),