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978-1-107-05049-5 — Probabilities, Hypotheticals, and Counterfactuals
in Ancient Greek Thought
Victoria Wohl
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PROBABILITIES, HYPOTHETICALS,
AND COUNTERFACTUALS IN
ANCIENT GREEK THOUGHT

This volume explores the conceptual terrain defined by the Greek word *eikos*: the probable, likely, or reasonable. A term of art in Greek rhetoric, a defining feature of literary fiction, a seminal mode of historical, scientific, and philosophical inquiry, *eikos* was a way of thinking about the probable and improbable, the factual and counterfactual, the hypothetical and the real. These thirteen original and provocative studies examine the plausible arguments of courtroom speakers and the “likely stories” of philosophers, verisimilitude in art and literature, the likelihood of resemblance in human reproduction, the limits of human knowledge, and the possibilities of ethical and political agency. The first synthetic study of probabilistic thinking in ancient Greece, the volume illuminates a fascinating chapter in the history of Western thought.

VICTORIA WOHL is Professor of Classics at the University of Toronto. She works on the literature and culture of classical Athens. Her previously published work includes *Law's Cosmos: Juridical Discourse in Athenian Forensic Oratory* (2010), *Love among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens* (2002), and *Intimate Commerce: Exchange, Gender, and Subjectivity in Greek Tragedy* (1998).

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EDITED BY
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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
 a department of the University of Cambridge.

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 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107050495

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First published 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Probabilities, hypotheticals, and counterfactuals in ancient Greek thought / edited by Victoria Wohl.
 pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-05049-5 (hardback)

1. Philosophy, Ancient. 2. Reasoning. 3. Probabilities. 4. Logic, Ancient.
 5. Greece – Civilization – To 146 B.C. 1. Wohl, Victoria, 1966– editor of compilation.

B187.R35P76 2014

180 – dc23 2014002500

ISBN 978-1-107-05049-5 Hardback

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Preface

This volume began its rather unlikely existence as a workshop entitled “*Eikos*: Probabilities, Hypotheticals, and Counterfactuals in Ancient Greek Thought,” held at the University of Toronto in May 2010. The purpose of the workshop was twofold. The first aim was to use the notion of *eikos* – the probable or likely – as a means of traversing the sub-disciplines of Classics; interdisciplinarity was not just a methodological principle of the workshop but also an object of study, as we explicitly examined the way in which the concept mutated from one discourse to another. Second, we explored whether, given these discursive variations, *eikos* in fact denoted a coherent set of issues for the Greeks and whether it thus constitutes a coherent object of scholarly analysis. We determined that it did and it does. As our discussions revealed the fruitful intersections and (sometimes surprising) connections between our different sub-areas, we concluded that *eikos* was valuable both as a vehicle for analyzing our field’s interdisciplinarity and as a central category of ancient Greek thought. Hence this volume.

The workshop was sponsored by the Department of Classics at the University of Toronto and a workshop grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I would like to thank my then-chair, Alison Keith, for her support, and the graduate students, Adriana Brook Carter, Marie-Pierre Krück, Miranda Robinson, and Lee Sawchuk, who participated in the workshop as moderators. I am particularly grateful to Marie-Pierre Krück for her invaluable aid in organizing the event, as well as for her eagle-eyed assistance in copy-editing the volume. She was also responsible for finding the cover image, Marcel Duchamp’s *Network of Stoppages*. Vincent Farenga deserves the credit (or blame) for encouraging me to publish the results of our workshop. The process has been full of contingencies, and at various points it looked as if this volume would itself remain purely hypothetical, if not counterfactual. My thanks to Michael Sharp for his help in making it actual, as well as to all the contributors for their patience and their superb contributions. Finally, I am grateful to Erik

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Preface

Gunderson for sharing with me the fruits of his own editorial experience, for his advice and good judgment throughout the process, and for his unflagging support, both technical and moral.

Abbreviations of ancient authors and titles can be found in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, 3rd edn., 1996.