

PHIL 204/2017/Greek Philosophy: Notes on Reading for Week 1

The earliest Philosophers: A Summary of important points.

In the works of the 'Milesian' philosophers Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes:

1. Anthropomorphic myths about the activities of the gods are replaced with a 'reasoned' physical theory.
2. There is a search for a single material principle which seems to reflect a desire for simplicity in explanation.
3. A distinction begins to be made between the origin of things, (their *originative* principle(s)), what they are 'made from', and their constitution, (their *constitutive* principle(s)), what they are 'made of'.
4. There is a realisation that all observed variety of the universe (*kosmos*) might be explained in terms of one or more material principles.
5. There is an attempt also to give an account of the origin of the universe (cosmogony).
6. There is the first awareness of the idea that everything has an explanation, of what is known as 'The Principle Of Sufficient Reason' (*Everything is due to something*). This is evident in the gradual appearance of the notion of explanation by appeal to the orderly character of the ultimate material principle or principles. This is clearest in Anaximenes: The originative and constitutive principle of the *kosmos* is air. All the familiar phenomena of the world are all manifestations, somehow, of the contraction and rarefaction of air.
7. In addition, a rational theology is combined with a naturalistic account of the universe. The divine for Anaximenes is in some sense air. In Anaximander it is the unlimited. Thales doesn't say that it is water but he does say that the gods are everywhere.

Some key terms:

Presocratic natural philosophers proposed accounts of the universe which tended to be:

Materialistic: Everything is to be explained in terms of the properties of some basic material stuff(s) - eg water or air.

Physicalistic: Did not appeal to a mind or minds to account for the phenomena they were interested in.

Naturalistic: Did not appeal to unfamiliar 'super natural' beings / properties to account for familiar phenomena.

Reductionistic Reduce the number of basic stuffs to a small number.

Monistic Reduce the number of basic stuffs to one.