

A First Philosophers Dialogue

THALES: To summarize our lesson, the proof of the origin of the Earth is right now before your eyes. Turn around for a moment class and gaze out toward the sea. The mist rises from the water into the sky. The clouds darken in colour as they fill with water until they overflow like a bucket and finally rain down upon us. Water, class, is the natural principle of all things. Just look at this seed here, it has a moist nature, and it is water that causes its growth. It is water that is clearly the origin of our earth and since it emerged from water we can reasonably conclude that it is now resting upon it. We have a question, Anaximander?

ANAXIMANDER: I understand your argument professor, but my question to you is that if the earth rests upon water, what then does the water rest upon?

THALES: I'm sorry I don't understand your question. It wouldn't rest on anything, its just there.

ANAXIMANDER: Well it has to rest on something. Regardless, whatever the answer is, it would have to rest upon something else, and that on something further and so on.

THALES: My prized student, you need not concern yourself with this question. What the water rests upon is irrelevant to us since we don't live there, and besides we could never know for sure. We live here, on earth, and need only be concerned with our own world.

ANAXIMANDER: Yes, but still, I think to understand our own world we need to understand the cosmos as a whole.

THALES: Ok Anaximander, if you want to venture into the land of the Gods, do you care to offer the class a theory?

ANAXIMANDER: Well it seems to me that the question of what the earth rests upon can go on to infinity and therefore the cosmos must have no bounds. The first principle of the cosmos must be the infinite, the source and element of all existing things. I theorize that the earth was formed when the opposites of hot and cold separated out. As hot broke off it formed a ring of fire around the earth like bark on a tree. Next, hot broke off of this ring to form the ring of the moon, followed by that of the sun and of the stars. The earth itself is in the shape of a giant cylinder. It floats in the centre of the infinite, remaining still, in a state of equilibrium.

THALES: The infinite? You have quite the imagination. If all of these objects, the earth, the moon, the stars, the sun are all out there floating around in the infinite with no bounds, why do they not crash into one another?

ANAXIMANDER: Well I believe the earth travelled to the centre under the influence of vortex motion. The earth is the heaviest so it naturally gravitates to the centre. The rest are arranged in concentric circles around the earth according to their weight; the ocean,

air, the heavens. The earth remains in the same position because it does not have sufficient reason to move. I also calculate that the ring of the sun is 28 times, the ring of the moon is 18 times, and the ring of the stars is 9 times that of the earth.

THALES: Wow that is quite the hypothesis, but I'm impressed to see you using mathematics to support your argument. When I was your age I was using my math skills to corner the market in olive oil. Does anyone else think they have a better theory than their teacher before we move on?

THALES: Well that was sarcasm but I see a hand up. Young Anaximenes, care to enlighten us on the formation of our world?

ANAXIMENES: I'm inclined to agree with Anaximander that the underlying nature of all things is the infinite, but I disagree that this underlying nature is indeterminate. I believe it is air itself.

ANAXIMANDER: If your answer is air, then how do you account for the water in the sea out there?

ANAXIMENES: I believe that the elements are the result of changes in the air. Therefore, as the air is dilated it becomes hotter, thinner, lighter, and brighter. When it is compressed it becomes colder, denser, heavier, and darker. When air is dilated, fire results, when it is compressed, the wind, water, the earth, and eventually stone are the result. Everything in our world, professor, I believe is from air and is in fact still air.

THALES: A giant cylinder floating around in the air? That seems a little far fetched.

ANAXIMENES: Well I don't agree that it is cylindrical in shape, but flat, more like a giant leaf. I believe the moon is also flat, as is the sun.

THALES: Well young men, these are some very imaginative theories but I bid you caution. With all that star gazing your liable fall into a well.