

Anaximander

- an-AXE-i-man-der
- Born c. 611 BCE (as he was 64 in 547)
- Was a student or follower of Thales
- monist and materialist

Anaximander

- Single archê is a “stuff”, apeiron
AH-pay-ron
- Infinite, Boundless, Indefinite,
Unlimited
- Could it mean Innumerable?

Anaximander

Of those who declared that the first principle is one, moving and indefinite Anaximander ... said that the indefinite was the first principle and element of things that are, and he was the first to introduce this name for the first principle [i.e., he was the first to call the first principle indefinite].

Anaximander

He says that the first principle was neither water nor any other of the things called elements, but some other nature which is indefinite out of which come to be all the heavens and the worlds in them.

Anaximander

The things that are / perish into the things out of which they come to be / according to necessity, for they (i.e., the opposites) pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the ordering of time, as he says in rather poetical language.

Simplicius (Cohen, 10)

Anaximander

He declares that what arose from the eternal and is productive of [or capable of giving birth to] hot and cold was separated off at the coming to be of this cosmos, and a kind of sphere of flame from this grew around the dark mist about the earth like bark about a tree. When it was broken off and enclosed in certain circles, the sun, moon and stars came to be.

Pseudo-Plutarch (Cohen, 11)

What does Anaximander
mean by *apeiron*?

Perhaps something temporally
indefinite?

- Something eternal or having divine
immortality like a god?
- “all enfolding” and “all controlling”

What does Anaximander
mean by *apeiron*?

Perhaps something temporally
indefinite?

- Something immanent in all things
 - A life force?
 - A principle, rule or law of change?

Anaximander

- The *archê* could not be just one of the main elements.
- If one of the elements were the *archê*, they would over time consume the others. There is a balance, Anaximander thinks, between the opposites.

What does Anaximander
mean by *apeiron*?

Perhaps something temporally
indefinite?

- Opposites

- Justice and Retribution – keep the
substances from destroying each
other.

What does Anaximander mean by *apeiron*?

- Opposites
 - Prevalence of one substance over another is injustice
 - Some cosmic force (justice) maintains a balance between the elements.

Anaximander

Argument as to why the elements
(individually or collectively)
cannot be the archê.

Anaximander

1. Opposites are at war with one another.
2. Hot, cold, etc. are thought of as *things*, not *qualities*.

Anaximander

3a. No one of the opposites could have been **infinite** because if they were there would be nothing else.

Anaximander

3b. Likewise no one of the opposites could have been the *archê*, or its opposite would never have come to be.

Anaximander

4. But all the “elements” are either opposites or are essentially connected to an opposite (e.g., water is cold, fire is hot).

Anaximander

5. Thus, no element, no **familiar** stuff can be the original *archê*.

[*argument adapted from Marc Cohen's Ancient Philosophy page]

What does Anaximander
mean by *apeiron*?

Perhaps something spatially
indefinite?

- There is no early use of *apeiron* that means “non-spatial”.

What does Anaximander mean by *apeiron*?

Perhaps something spatially indefinite?

- Perhaps indefinite in kind is meant, i.e., it did not resemble fire, air, water or earth.
- Is something *between* (intermediate) the elements or something altogether different from them?

Anaximander

“He says that the first principle was neither water nor any other of the things called elements, but some other nature which is indefinite out of which come to be all the heavens and the worlds in them.”

Simplicius

(Cohen, 10)

Problem of the Worlds

BUT ...

- Are the worlds coexistent?
- Might the worlds be innumerably successive?
- Will our world pass away and then a new world begin?

Anaximander

- Cosmogony: Anaximander believes that the cosmos originated by spinning off from something indestructible and eternal from which everything else arose and into which everything returns.

Anaximander

- The vortex comes out of the Indefinite/Infinite, the vortex *isn't* the Indefinite itself.

Anaximander

Anaximander does think the earth is encircled by an indefinite number of rings of celestial bodies.

But “successive worlds” view seems to go against mythological background of Greek thought.

Anaximander

- But idea of innumerably successive worlds *is* part of atomistic thought (Leucippus and Democritus). They thought there were innumerable worlds coming into being and passing away throughout infinite space.

Theophrastus could have been reading anachronistically.

What does Anaximander mean by *apeiron*?

- Perhaps something qualitatively indefinite?
 - Most scholars think that it probably was a *qualitatively* indefinite, i.e., a primordial goop or material stuff.
 - Predecessor to Aristotle's prime matter?

Anaximander's Greatest Hits

- He posited something like a theory of evolution. He did not believe that the earth came about in a sudden act of creation. He thought that the most likely origin of humanity was from fish and that organic life emerged from "the moist element".

Anaximander

- Thales believed that the earth was flat Anaximander believed the earth was spherical.

Anaximander

- Anaximander also broke away from the view that the earth rests on something. He believed that the earth is “on high, held up by nothing, but remaining on account of its similar distance from all things”.

Anaximander

- He postulated some theoretical, non-anthropomorphic or personified account to explain phenomena – namely, matter.