

THE  
FIRST PHILOSOPHERS  
OF GREECE

AN EDITION AND TRANSLATION OF THE  
REMAINING FRAGMENTS OF THE PRÆ-SOKRATIC  
PHILOSOPHERS, TOGETHER WITH A TRANSLATION OF THE  
MORE IMPORTANT ACCOUNTS OF THEIR OPINIONS  
CONTAINED IN THE EARLY EPITOMES  
OF THEIR WORKS

BY  
ARTHUR FAIRBANKS

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## P R E F A C E

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THE Hegelian School, and in particular Zeller, have shown us the place of the earlier thinkers in the history of Greek thought, and the importance of a knowledge of their work for all who wish to understand Plato and Aristotle. Since Zeller's monumental work, several writers (e.g. Benn, *Greek Philosophers*, vol. i. London 1883; Tannery, *Science hellène*, Paris 1887; Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, London 1892) have traced for us the history of this development, but the student who desires to go behind these accounts and examine the evidence for himself still finds the material difficult of access. This material consists of numerous short fragments preserved by later writers, and of accounts of the opinions of these thinkers given mainly by Aristotle and by the Greek doxographers (i.e. students of early thought who made epitomes of the opinions of the masters). The Greek text of the doxographers is now accessible to students in the admirable critical edition of H. Diels (Berlin 1879). The Greek text of the fragments has been published in numerous short monographs, most of which are not readily accessible to the student to-day; it is contained with a vast deal of other matter in Mullach's *Fragmenta Graecorum Philosophorum* (Paris 1883-1888, vol. i.-iii.), but the text

is in many places so carelessly constructed that it does not serve the purposes of the scholar.

In the present work it has been my plan to prepare for the student a Greek text of the fragments of these early philosophers which shall represent as accurately as possible the results of recent scholarship, and to add such critical notes as may be necessary to enable the scholar to see on what basis the text rests. From this text I have prepared a translation of the fragments into English, and along with this a translation of the important passages bearing on these early thinkers in Plato and Aristotle, and in the Greek doxographists as collected by Diels, in order that the student of early Greek thought might have before him in compact form practically all the materials on which the history of this thought is to be based. It has been difficult, especially in the case of Herakleitos and the Pythagoreans, to draw the line between material to be inserted, and that to be omitted; but, in order to keep the volume within moderate limits, my principle has been to insert only the passages from Plato and Aristotle and from the doxographists.

The Greek text of Herakleitos is based on the edition of Bywater; that of Xenophanes on the edition of the Greek lyric poets by Hiller-Bergk; that of Parmenides on the edition of Karsten; and that of Empedokles on the edition of Stein. I have not hesitated, however, to differ from these authorities in minor details, indicating in the notes the basis for the text which I have given.

For a brief discussion of the relative value of the sources of these fragments the student is referred to the Appendix.

My thanks are due to several friends for their kind assistance, in particular to Professor C. L. Brownson and Professor G. D. Lord, who have read much of the book in proof, and have given me many valuable suggestions. Nor can I pass over without mention the debt which all workers in this field owe to Hermann Diels. It is my great regret that his edition of Parmenides' *Lehrgedicht* failed to reach me until most of the present work was already printed. Nevertheless there is scarcely a page of the whole book which is not based on the foundation which he has laid.

ARTHUR FAIRBANKS.

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### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

Dox. = Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*, Berlin 1879.

Aet. = *Aetii de placitis reliquiae*.

Hipp. Phil. = *Hippolyti philosophumena*.

Epi. = *Epiphanii varia excerpta*.

Herm. = *Hermiae irrisio gentilium philosophorum*.

} Included in  
Diels, *Dox*.

Simp. Phys. = *Simplicii in Aristotelis physicorum libros quattuor priores* edidit H. Diels, Berlin 1882.

Simp. Cael. = *Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle's De caelo*.

For other abbreviations, see list of authors in the Index of sources.

# THE FIRST PHILOSOPHERS OF GREECE

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## I.

### THALES.

ACCORDING to Aristotle the founder of the Ionic physical philosophy, and therefore the founder of Greek philosophy, was Thales of Miletos. According to Diogenes Laertios, Thales was born in the first year of the thirty-fifth Olympiad (640 B.C.), and his death occurred in the fifty-eighth Olympiad (548-545 B.C.). He attained note as a scientific thinker and was regarded as the founder of Greek philosophy (because he discarded mythical explanations of things, and asserted that a physical element, water, was the first principle of all things). There are various stories of his travels, and in connection with accounts of his travels in Egypt he is credited with introducing into Greece the knowledge of geometry. Tradition also claims that he was a statesman, and as a practical thinker he is classed as one of the seven wise men. A work entitled 'Nautical Astronomy' was ascribed to him, but it was recognised as spurious even in antiquity.

Literature: F. Decker, *De Thälete Milesio*, Diss. Halle, 1865; Krische, *Forsch. auf d. Gebiet d. alt. Phil.* i. pp. 34-42; V. also *Acta Phil.* iv. Lips. 1875, pp. 328-330; *Revue Philos.* Mar. 1880; *Archiv f. d. Geschichte d. Phil.* ii. 165, 515.

(a) PASSAGES RELATING TO THALES IN PLATO AND  
IN ARISTOTLE.

Plato, *de Legg.* x. 899 B. And as for all the stars and the moon and the years and the months and all the seasons, can we hold any other opinion about them than this same one—that inasmuch as soul or souls appear to be the cause of all these things, and good souls the cause of every excellence, we are to call them gods, whether they order the whole heavens as living beings in bodies, or whether they accomplish this in some other form and manner? Is there any one who acknowledges this, and yet holds that all things are not full of gods?

Arist. *Met.* i. 3; 983 b 6. Most of the early students of philosophy thought that first principles in the form of matter, and only these, are the sources of all things; for that of which all things consist, the antecedent from which they have sprung, and into which they are finally resolved (in so far as being underlies them and is changed with their changes), this they say is the element and first principle of things. 983 b 18. As to the quantity and form of this first principle, there is a difference of opinion; but Thales, the founder of this sort of philosophy, says that it is water (accordingly he declares that the earth rests on water), getting the idea, I suppose, because he saw that the nourishment of all beings is moist, and that warmth itself is generated from moisture and persists in it (for that from which all things spring is the first principle of them); and getting the idea also from the fact that the germs of all beings are of a moist nature, while water is the first principle of the nature of what is moist. And there are some who think that the ancients, and they who lived long before the present generation, and the first students of the gods, had a similar idea in regard to nature; for in their poems Okeanos and Tethys were

the parents of generation, and that by which the gods swore was water,—the poets themselves called it Styx; for that which is most ancient is most highly esteemed, and that which is most highly esteemed is an object to swear by. Whether there is any such ancient and early opinion concerning nature would be an obscure question; but Thales is said to have expressed this opinion in regard to the first cause.

Arist. *de Coelo* ii. 13; 294 a 28. Some say that the earth rests on water. We have ascertained that the oldest statement of this character is the one accredited to Thales the Milesian, to the effect that it rests on water, floating like a piece of wood or something else of that sort.<sup>1</sup>

Arist. *de Anima* i. 2; 405 a 19. And Thales, according to what is related of him, seems to have regarded the soul as something endowed with the power of motion, if indeed he said that the loadstone has a soul because it moves iron. i. 5; 411 a 7. Some say that soul is diffused throughout the whole universe; and it may have been this which led Thales to think that all things are full of gods.

Simpl. in Arist. *de Anima* 8 r 32, 16.<sup>2</sup>—Thales posits water as the element, but it is the element of bodies, and he thinks that the soul is not a body at all. 31, 21 D.—And in speaking thus of Thales he adds with a degree of reproach that he assigned a soul to the magnetic stone as the power which moves the iron, that he might prove soul to be a moving power in it; but he did not assert that this soul was water, although water had been designated as the element, since he said that water is the element of substances, but he supposed soul to be unsubstantial form. 20 r 73, 22. For Thales, also, I suppose, thought all things to be full of gods, the gods being blended with them; and this is strange.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Herm. *I. G. P.* 10 (*Dox.* 653).

<sup>2</sup> In references to Simpl. in Arist. *de Anima* and *Physica*, the first numbers give folio and line, the second, page (and line) in the edition published by the Berlin Academy.

(b) PASSAGES RELATING TO THALES IN THE  
DOXOGRAPHISTS.

(Theophrastos, *Dox.* 475) *Simpl. Phys.* 6 r; 23, 21. Of those who say that the first principle [ $\alpha\rho\chi\eta$ ] is one and movable, to whom Aristotle applies the distinctive name of physicists, some say that it is limited; as, for instance, Thales of Miletos, son of Examyas, and Hippo who seems also to have lost belief in the gods. These say that the first principle is water, and they are led to this result by things that appear to sense; for warmth lives in moisture and dead things wither up and all germs are moist and all nutriment is moist. Now it is natural that things should be nourished by that from which each has come; and water is the first principle of moist nature . . . ; accordingly they assume that water is the first principle of all things, and they assert that the earth rests on water. Thales is the first to have set on foot the investigation of nature by the Greeks; although so many others preceded him, in Theophrastos's opinion he so far surpassed them as to cause them to be forgotten. It is said that he left nothing in writing except a book entitled 'Nautical Astronomy.'

Hipp. i.; *Dox.* 555. It is said that Thales of Miletos, one of the seven wise men, was the first to undertake the study of physical philosophy. He said that the beginning (the first principle) and the end of all things is water. All things acquire firmness as this solidifies, and again as it is melted their existence is threatened; to this are due earthquakes and whirlwinds and movements of the stars. And all things are movable and in a fluid state, the character of the compound being determined by the nature of the principle from which it springs. This principle is god, and it has neither beginning nor end.

Thales was the first of the Greeks to devote himself to the study and investigation of the stars, and was the originator of this branch of science; on one occasion he was looking up at the heavens, and was just saying he was intent on studying what was overhead, when he fell into a well; whereupon a maidservant named Thratta laughed at him and said: In his zeal for things in the sky he does not see what is at his feet.<sup>1</sup> And he lived in the time of Kroesos.

Plut. *Strom.* 1; *Dox.* 579.<sup>2</sup> He says that Thales was the earliest thinker to regard water as the first principle of all things. For from this all things come, and to it they all return.

Aet. *Plac.* i. 2; *Dox.* 275. Thales of Miletos regards the first principle and the elements as the same thing. But there is a very great difference between them, for elements are composite, but we claim that first principles are neither composite nor the result of processes. So we call earth, water, air, fire, elements; and we call them first principles for the reason that there is nothing antecedent to them from which they are sprung, since this would not be a first principle, but rather that from which it is derived. Now there is something anterior to earth and water from which they are derived, namely the matter that is formless and invisible, and the form which we call entelechy, and privation. So Thales was in error when he called water an element and a first principle. i. 3; 276. Thales the Milesian declared that the first principle of things is water. [This man seems to have been the first philosopher, and the Ionic school derived its name from him; for there were very many successive leaders in philosophy. And Thales was a student of philosophy in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Plato, *Theaet.* 174 A; Diog. Laer. i. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Epiphan. iii. 1; *Dox.* 589; Herm. *I. G. P.* 10; *Dox.* 653.

Egypt, but he came to Miletos in his old age.] For he says that all things come from water and all are resolved into water. The first basis for this conclusion is the fact that the seed of all animals is their first principle and it is moist; thus it is natural to conclude that all things come from water as their first principle. Secondly, the fact that all plants are nourished by moisture and bear fruit, and unless they get moisture they wither away. Thirdly, the fact that the very fire of the sun and the stars is fed by the exhalations from the waters, and so is the universe itself. 7; 301. Thales said that the mind in the universe is god, and the all is endowed with soul and is full of spirits; and its divine moving power pervades the elementary water. 8; 307. Thales et al. say that spirits are psychical beings; and that heroes are souls separated from bodies, good heroes are good souls, bad heroes are bad souls. 8; 307. The followers of Thales et al. assert that matter is turned about, varying, changing, and in a fluid state, the whole in every part of the whole. 12; 310. Thales and his successors declared that the first cause is immovable. 16; 314. The followers of Thales and Pythagoras hold that bodies can receive impressions and can be divided even to infinity; and so can all figures, lines, surfaces, solids, matter, place, and time. 18; 315. The physicists, followers of Thales, all recognise that the void is really a void. 21; 321. Thales: Necessity is most powerful, for it controls everything.

Aet. ii. 1; *Dox.* 327. Thales and his successors hold that the universe is one. 12; 340. Thales et al. hold that the sphere of the entire heaven is divided into five circles which they call zones; and of these the first is called the arctic zone, and is always visible, the next is the summer solstice, the next is the equinoctial, the next the winter solstice, and the next the antarctic, which is invisible. And the ecliptic in the three middle ones is

called the zodiac and is projected to touch the three middle ones. All these are cut by the meridian at a right angle from the north to the opposite quarter. 13; 341. The stars consist of earth, but are on fire. 20; 349. The sun consists of earth. 24; 353. The eclipses of the sun take place when the moon passes across it in direct line, since the moon is earthy in character; and it seems to the eye to be laid on the disk of the sun. 28; 358. The moon is lighted from the sun. 29; 360. Thales et al. agree with the mathematicians that the monthly phases of the moon show that it travels along with the sun and is lighted by it, and eclipses show that it comes into the shadow of the earth, the earth coming between the two heavenly bodies and blocking the light of the moon.

Aet. iii. 9-10; 376. The earth is one and spherical in form. 11; 377. It is in the midst of the universe. 15; 379. Thales and Demokritos find in water the cause of earthquakes.

Aet. iv. 1; 384. Thales thinks that the Etesian winds blowing against Egypt raise the mass of the Nile, because its outflow is beaten back by the swelling of the sea which lies over against its mouth. 2; 386. Thales was the first to declare that the soul is by nature always moving or self-moving.

Aet. v. 26; 438. Plants are living animals; this is evident from the fact that they wave their branches and keep them extended, and they yield to attack and relax them freely again, so that weights also draw them down.

(Philodemos) Cic. *de Nat. Deor.* i. 10; *Dox.* 531. For Thales of Miletos, who first studied these matters, said that water is the first principle of things, while god is the mind which formed all things from water. If gods exist without sense and mind, why should god be connected with water, if mind itself can exist without a body?

## II.

## ANAXIMANDROS.

ANAXIMANDROS of Miletos was a companion or pupil of Thales. According to Apollodoros he was born in the second or third year of the forty-second Olympiad (611–610 B.C.). Of his life little is known; Zeller infers from the statement of Aelian (*V. H.* iii. 17) to the effect that he led the Milesian colony into Apollonia, that he was a man of influence in Miletos. He was a student of geography and astronomy; and various inventions, such as the sundial, are attributed to him. His book, which was referred to as the first philosophical treatise in Greece, may not have received the title ‘περὶ φύσεως’ until after his death. It soon became rare, and Simplicius does not seem to have had access to it.

Literature: Schleiermacher, *Abh. d. Berl. Akad.* 1815; *Op. Phil.* ii. 171; Krische, *Forschungen*, pp. 42–52; Teichmüller, *Studien*, pp. 1–70, 545–588; Büsgen, *Das ἀπειρον Anax.* Wiesbaden 1867; Lütze, *Das ἀπειρον Anax.* Leipz. 1878; J. Neuhäuser, *De Anax. Miles.* Bonn 1879, and in more complete form, Bonn 1883; Tannery, *Rev. Phil.* v. (1882); Natorp, *Phil. Monatshefte*, 1884; Tannery, *Archiv f. d. Gesch. d. Philos.* viii. 443 ff.; Diels, *ibid.* x. (1897) 228 ff.

## (a) FRAGMENTS OF ANAXIMANDROS.

1. Arist. *Phys.* iii. 4; 203 b 13 ff. The words ἀθάνατον γὰρ καὶ ἀνώλεθρον and by some the words περιέχειν

ἅπαντα καὶ πάντα κυβερνᾶν are thought to come from Anaximandros.

2. In *Simpl. Phys.* 6 r (24, 19); *Dox.* 476, it is generally agreed that the following phrase is from Anaximandros: κατὰ τὸ χρεών· διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ ἀλλήλοις τίσιν καὶ δίκην τῆς ἀδικίας.<sup>1</sup>

*Translation.*—1. ‘Immortal and indestructible,’ ‘surrounds all and directs all.’ 2. ‘(To that they return when they are destroyed) of necessity; for he says that they suffer punishment and give satisfaction to one another for injustice.’

(b) PASSAGES RELATING TO ANAXIMANDROS IN  
ARISTOTLE.

*Arist. Phys.* i. 4; 187 a 12. For some who hold that the real, the underlying substance, is a unity, either one of the three [elements] or something else that is denser than fire and more rarefied than air, teach that other things are generated by condensation and rarefaction. . . . 20. And others believe that existing opposites are separated from the unity, as Anaximandros says, and those also who say that unity and multiplicity exist, as Empedokles and Anaxagoras; for these separate other things from the mixture [μῆγμα].<sup>2</sup>

*Phys.* iii. 4; 203 b 7. There is no beginning of the infinite, for in that case it would have an end. But it is without beginning and indestructible, as being a sort of first principle; for it is necessary that whatever comes into existence should have an end, and there is a conclusion of all destruction. Wherefore as we say, there is no first principle of this [*i.e.* the infinite], but it itself

<sup>1</sup> The fragment is discussed at length by Ziegler, *Archiv f. d. Gesch. d. Philos.* i. (1883) p. 16 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Theophrastos (*Dox.* 478) under Anaxagoras, *infra*.