

# Milesian School

The first school of philosophy in Greece rose in Miletus, one of the most flourished cities in Ionian. Its importance lies in the fact that Milesian philosophers put philosophical questions squarely and answered them without reference to mythical being.

## 1 Thales

Thales (624 BC-548 BC) is the first philosopher of Greece and is known as one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece, with his saying “Water is best”. Since Thales himself has no works remained, knowledge about him is limited to secondary sources and mostly conjectural. According to Aristotle, Thales’ philosophical views can be concluded to three points: (1) All things are full filled with gods; (2) The earth is a disc floating on water; (3) Water is the material cause of all objects.

## 2 Anaximander

It is said that Anaximander (611 BC-546 BC) was Thales’ pupil. His advance compared with Thales lies in a tendency towards abstraction and endeavours to explain the process of becoming. Here is his argument about the problem of substance: The essence of objects can not be any concrete substance, for these materials, like water, must be self-explained. So concrete elements must not be the material cause of things. The essence of things is an eternal, imperishable substance, which he calls the *Infinite*. It is an infinite, intermediate and qualitatively undifferentiated matter. It should be noted that the view of the *Infinite*, although shows a tendency to abstraction, is still focus on material cause. From the *Infinite* all things are separated and to it all things return. Different matters are separated from the *Infinite* due to its eternal motion. First it is hot, then cold, which is surrounded by hot. The cold becomes moisture, then air, after being heated by the hot. The air expands and breaks the sphere of hot. As a result, the hot streams and forms heavenly bodies surrounded by air. They are forced to move around the cylindrical earth, which is the central of the universe. The most remote heavenly body is the sun, then the moon, then the stars and planets. Living beings on earth arise from moisture. Some of them come out of the

24 water upon land and finally adapt themselves to new environment. Man, like other creatures, derives  
25 through such process.

26 Anaximander also proposed theory about the recurrence of world. Things are originated from the  
27 *Infinite* by separation, *i.e.* the origin of things is a process by which the *Infinite* is robbed, which is an  
28 injustice. As a result, everything must finally return to the *Infinite*, following the order of justice. The  
29 universe originates from the the *Infinite* and finally returns to it, and is formed again. Thus, there is an  
30 eternal and cyclical recurrence of the universe.

### 31 **3 Anaximenes**

32 The last philosopher of Milesian school is Anaximenes (588 BC-524 BC), who holds the view that air  
33 is the essence of objects and things arise by the process of rarefaction and condensation. When air is  
34 rarefied, it becomes fire; when condensed, air becomes, in turn, wind, cloud, water, earth, and stone.  
35 Thus, changes are explained by motion of air and qualitative differences among elements are reduced to  
36 quantitative term, *i.e.* the degree of rarefaction or condensation. This is the first example of reducing  
37 qualitative differences to quantitative term.