History of Western Philosophy
Kookmin University

Peter Lee, Spring 2019

L02

- Two Principles of Philosophy
- The Pre-Socratics and Cosmologies

Two Principles of Philosophy

1. The principle of reason
   "The Golden Cord of Reason" (Plato, *Laws*)

ATHENIAN: … May we not conceive each of us living beings to be a puppet of the Gods, either their plaything only, or created with a purpose—which of the two we cannot certainly know? But we do know, that these affections in us are like cords and strings, which pull us different and opposite ways, and to opposite actions …
there is one among these cords which every man ought to grasp and never let go, but to pull with it against all the rest; and this is the sacred and golden cord of reason …. there are others which are hard and of iron, but this one is soft because golden …

Two Principles of Philosophy

2. The principle of charity (Quine, Davidson)

"Since **charity** is not an option, but a condition of having a workable theory, it is meaningless to suggest that we might fall into massive error by endorsing it. … Charity is forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters.…
We make maximum sense of the words and thoughts of others when we interpret in a way that optimizes agreement."

Two Principles of Philosophy

2. The principle of charity (Quine, Davidson):

- The other is making true statements.
- The other is using words in the ordinary way.
- The other is making valid arguments.
- The other is saying something interesting.

Without this principle, we often end up with **rhetoric** [persuading; winning].

*Philosophy is about the truth, not winning

Two Principles of Philosophy

Argument <u>for</u> Abortion:

1. Ending the life of a person is murder.
2. Abortion ends the life of a fetus.
3. So, abortion is murder.
4. Therefore, abortion is wrong.

- Argument invalid [the conclusions do not follow logically from the premises] Why?

  → some assumptions left unsaid [enthymeme]

- Principle of charity supplies missing premises

Map of Classical Greece

Thrace: Democritus, Protagoras

Macedon: Aristotle

[Samos: Pythagoras]

Elea, Italy: Parmenides, Zeno

Colophon: Xenophanes

Sicily, Italy: Empedocles
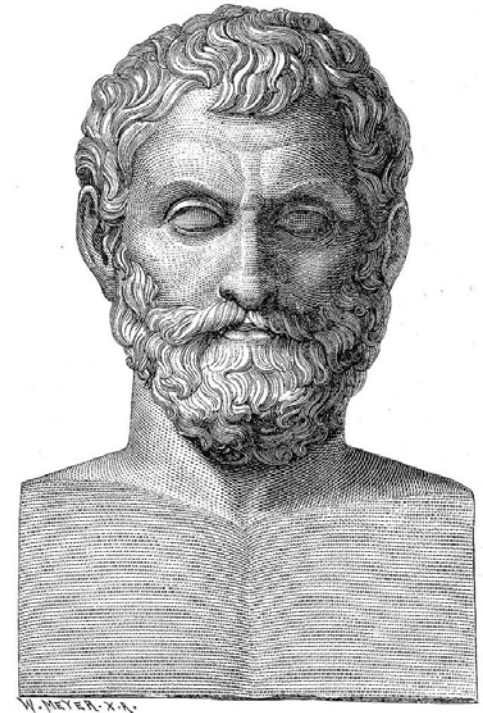
Ephesus: Heraclitus

Athens: Socrates, Plato

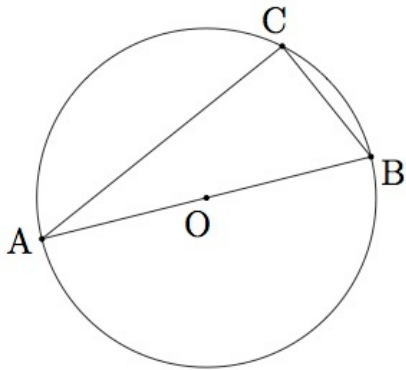Miletus: Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes

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Greek Philosophers Timeline

- ~625-545 BC. Thales
- ~610-545. Anaximander
- ~585-528. Anaximenes
- ~570-470. Xenophanes
- ~535-475. Heraclitus
- ~515-440. Parmenides
- ~495-435. Empedocles
- ~460-370. Democritus
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- ~490-420. Protagoras
- ~469-399. Socrates
- ~428-347. Plato
- 384-322. Aristotle

- 7th or 8th century BC. Homer, *Illiad and Odyssey*
- ~750-650. Hesiod, *Theogony*
- **585**. Solar Eclipse predicted
- 499-449. Greco-Persian Wars
- 448-430. Athenian hegemony
- 431-404. Peloponnesian War
- 395-355. Athenian League II
- 355-322. Under Macedon
- 323. Death of Alexander
- 322. Athenian gov. dissolved
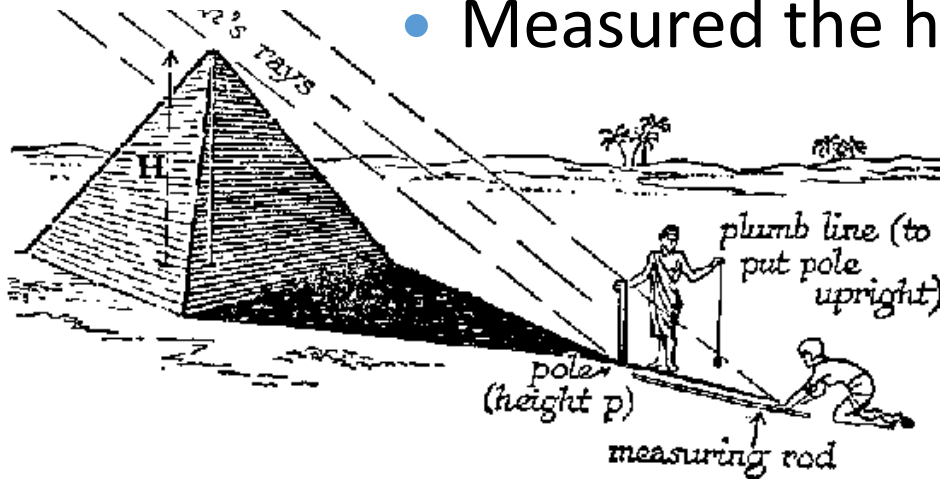- 146~ Under Rome

Pre-Socratics: Thales

- From Miletus (~625-545 BC) First of the **Miletian** philosophers (or the **Ionian** philosophers)

- Known as the first philosopher by all accounts of history of philosophy.

- Bertrand Russell: "Philosophy begins with Thales."

Pre-Socratics: Thales

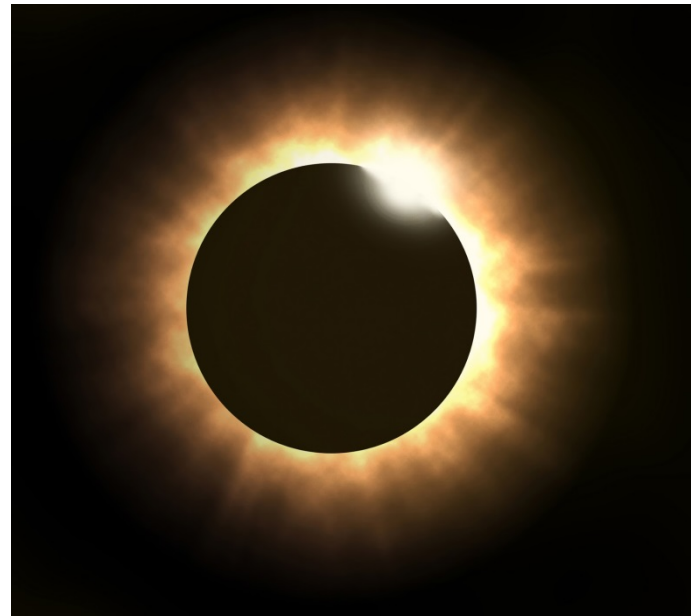- Inscribed a right triangle in a circle.

- Measured the height of a pyramid.

- Fixed the length of the year.

Pre-Socratics: Thales

Ursa Minor
(ur'--sa my'-ner)
The Little Bear

- Identified and used the constellation of the little bear for navigation.

- Predicted the solar eclipse of 585 BC, often considered the starting date of western philosophy

  [or western science].

Pre-Socratics: Thales

- Said the earth rests on water.

- Everything is made out of water.

Significance of Thale's Idea

First **Chaos** was created, then wide-bosomed **Earth**, the eternal unshaken foundation of the immortal gods who inhabit the snowy peaks of Olympus or the gloomy **Tartarus** within the depths of the wide-pathed Earth. **Love** then arose, most beautiful among the immortal gods … [Hesiod, *Theogony*]

Q: What is this storm, thunder and lightning?
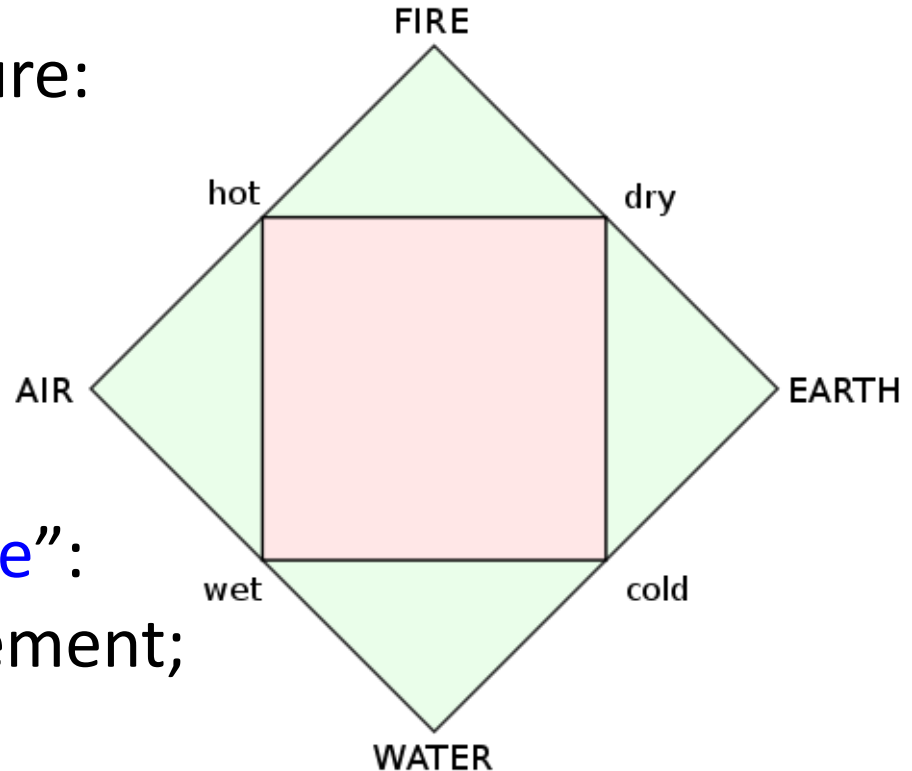**Religious**: Zeus is hurling down his lightning bolts because he is angry (who, why).
Philosopher: It is a phenomenon, a flow of energy (what, how). Solar eclipse also a pattern in nature.

Significance of Thale's Idea

The four elements of nature:
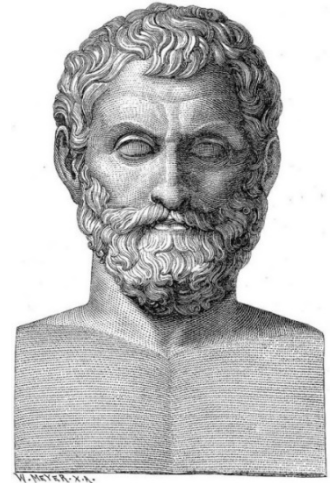- Earth
- Water
- Air
- Fire

For Thales, Water is "Arche":
the most fundamental element;
believed reality was **One**.

- "**Onto**" (being, becoming); eg. Ontology: study of what is real; "**Arche**" (origin, principle); eg. Archeology: study of ancient or first things.

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Thales: Postscript

" Thales has met an unkind fate in his old age. He went out from the court of his house at night, as was his custom, with his maidservant to view the stars, and forgetting where he was, as he gazed, he got to the edge of a steep slope and fell over. In such wise have the Milesians lost their astronomer. Let us who were his pupils cherish his memory, and let it be cherished by our children and pupils." [*CR*: 8]

Others on the Basic Element

Anaximander (~610-545): student of Thales
- Said Arche was the "**infinite**."
- If one element were the Arche, it would "take over the universe."
- The ultimate reality is unknowable because it is "**non-sensory.**"

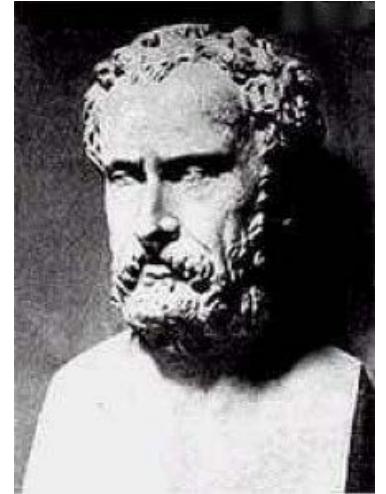**Anaximenes** (~585-~528): contemporary or student of Anaximander
- Said the basic element was **Air**. (condensation, rarefaction)

- **Q**: Is this progress over Anaximander?

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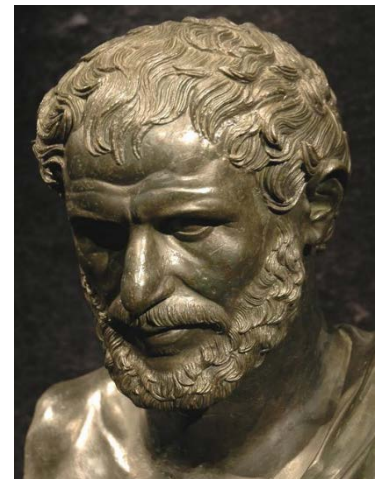# Others on the Basic Element

Xenophanes: (~570-470)

- Said the basic element was **Earth**.
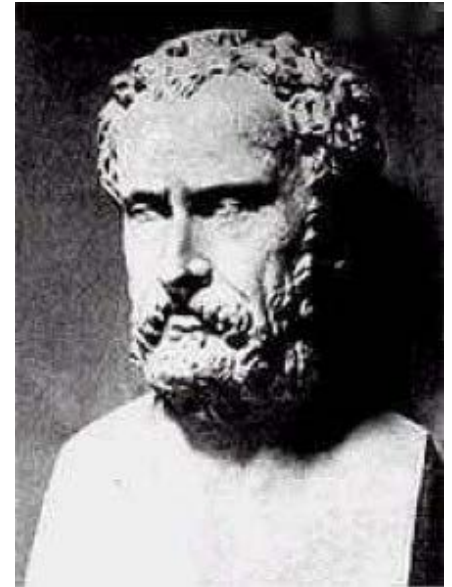- Also, God is beyond human comprehension.

Heraclitus: (~535-475)

- Said everything was "**Fire**."
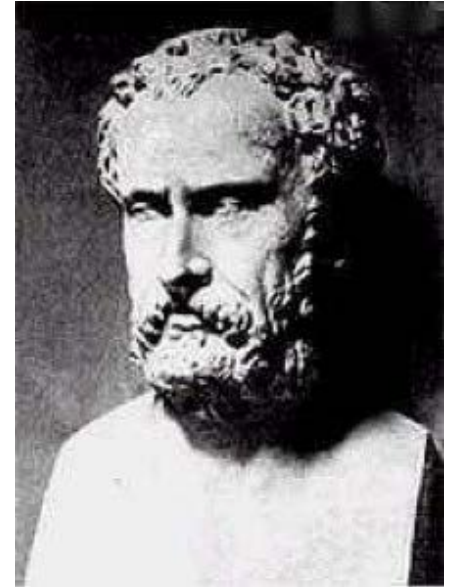- But there is also no Arche, only change [contradiction?]

Xenophanes: God

- One of the Ionians, from Colophon (~570-470 BC)
- First philosopher of religion
- Monotheism vs. Polytheism
- "Men create gods in their own image." "There is one god ... similar to mortals neither in shape nor in thought." [*CR* 10]
- Against God being represented anthropomorphically, as a human-like being: "If cows and horses or lions had hands and could draw ..."

Xenophanes: God

- "God is neither infinite nor finite, neither changeable nor changeless." [CR: 10]

- Such a statement violates the principle of non-contradiction (the law of excluded middle: $p \lor \sim p$).

- Goes against "Golden Cord of Reason."

- Xenophanes seems to cross the line (?) between philosophy and religion: how do you argue for or against it?

Next Week: L03   The Pre-Socratics and Cosmologies II