Philosophy Paper One

Thales, argued to be the first philosopher by some, proposed that everything in the universe was formed from water. Perhaps the strongest argument for this proposition is the fact that water transforms. As Ring notes, "the development of other objects from that water could be a transformation, rather than a replacement of original stuff" (Ring 20). Through an examination of water, one may quite clearly see how it can transform from a solid phase (ice), a liquid phase (water), and a gas phase (water vapor). Therefore, it can be possible to see how this substance might have the potential to form every living thing of the universe. However, Anaximenes did not agree with Thales' theory in which everything in the universe is created out of water.

According to the edition of Greek Philosophy edited by Allen, Anaximenes argued that, "the primordial unity is to be treated as stuff, a matter out of which thing s are made. The diverse elements of the world are to be attributed to changes in this primitive matter" (Allen 4). In other words, Anaximenes believed that the universe was created from some object that would transform to create other objects. In this sense, it seems like this theory is not much different from the transformation of water, used to explain Thales' theory of water creating the objects of the universe. However, Anaximenes claims that the object that is transformed is not water, as Thales suggests, but rather that it is air.

While it seems as though the air in Anaximenes' theory could be easily replaced by Thales' water, upon further examination of Anaximenes' theory we see how this could not be the case. As noted in Ring, it is possible that Anaximenes didn't believe that water was the element that created all things of the universe since, "it is difficult to see how fire

could be derived from water" (Ring 31). It appears that water does not create fire, but rather it destroys fire. And if water can not create fire, then, how could it be the element in the universe that forms all things? Therefore, although it seems as though Thales' water could replace Anaximenes' air, one can see the predicament that arises when determining how water could create fire. So, Anaximenes determined that the universe could not be formed from water. However, it is now important to look at how air can be transformed into different objects.

In an observation, Anaximenes noted that when lips are compressed the air blown out of a person's mouth will be cool, but when the lips are relaxed and the mouth is open that air becomes warm (Allen 33). In this observation Anaximenes noted that air possessed qualities of differing temperatures, according to him, based on their density. Cool air was denser, since it was compressed from lips, where hot air was less dense, since it came from lips that were loose. With this observation, Anaximenes could have determined that density caused air to transform into different objects. If this was the case, then less dense air would form fire and as air would be compressed it would form wind, water, and rock (Allen 4). Through observations, Anaximenes notes the density properties of air (along with temperature differences) and proposes this to be the method in which air can transform to create all things of the universe.

Now that the basic principles of Anaximenes' theory have been stated, it is necessary to analyze it. It is important to determine whether is ideas are plausible when further trying to understand his theory. If the reason Anaximenes proposed air as the element that formed the universe was because water could not create fire, then I think that his claim is understandable. If water can't create fire, and fire can't create water, then

how could either object be the element that creates all things? Therefore, it makes sense to assume that their must be some other element or thing that has created the objects in the universe. However, why should air be chosen? There seem to be a multitude of other things that could have caused the formation of things in the universe. However, the item that forms the universe seems to have to have the ability of transformation. If it doesn't have the ability to transform, it would seem that that element or object would remain the same throughout history. Therefore, it would be difficult to determine how that object was able to form the universe if it never changed into different forms or states. Therefore it makes sense to assume that this element is water (since it clearly transforms), but if water can't create fire, then it makes sense for Anaximenes to choose air as this element.

By performing the experiment of blowing air, an individual can feel the difference in temperature on their hand. It isn't as though the air inside them has changed in any state, besides the method that they blew it out. So it does appear that air changes in form when the density of it changes. And due to changing density, as mentioned earlier, Anaximenes proposed that air could compress enough to form wind, liquid water, and stone. This proposition also could make sense. I'm sure that most individuals have walked outside on a cool day when there has appeared to be somewhat of a mist in the air. In addition, since I have traveled to Arizona before, I have felt the dry heat that is present in the desert air. Therefore, it seems as though air has the property to transform, and perhaps if it becomes hot enough or cool enough it can have the potential to form wind, water, stone, and fire. In that sense, Anaximenes' theory about the compression of air seems to make sense. However, I think the transformation property of air is not as clear as Anaximenes had hoped.

At this point, it appears that there is a large amount of support in Anaximenes theory. By analyzing his statements we can see that it does seem unlikely that water could produce fire, and that air may serve as an alternative theory. However, someone supporting Thales' idea may have a different opinion on the transformation abilities of air. As said earlier, seeing the transformation property of water is quite clear. If you turn on the faucet at home you can see liquid water running from it, pour it into a glass and place that water in a cold environment and you can see frozen water form, place that water into a pot and apply enough heat, and you can see water vapor created in the form of steam. However, it is not so easy to see the transformation properties of air. Sure, air can have different temperatures, and perhaps even different densities, but does that give it the ability to transform? I have seen water transform several times in my life, however I have never seen air compressed and cool enough to form a stone, nor have I seen air become hot enough to create fire. In that sense it seems that the transformation abilities of air are much more complex and challenging to observe. In fact I'm willing to wager quite a bit, that no one has seen air compressed to the point of creating stone. And if no one has seen air transform, it is challenging to assume that his has the property of transformation, even if it does appear to change temperature with transformation. Therefore Anaximenes' theory may not be as clear and supported as it once seemed earlier in this paper.

However, just because it is challenging to observe the actual transformation of air, that does not mean that air can not transform. In addition, although we have seen water change states, I doubt anyone has anyone seen solid ice turn into rock. Therefore, it really isn't clear whether air or water is the element that created the objects in the universe. Perhaps one of them is this element, or perhaps there is some other object or element that

has formed the universe (and the objects in it). At this point, though, it is challenging to determine whose theory may be correct. That does not mean, however, that the strengths and weaknesses of each argument should not be examined and investigated.