

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

## Anaximander (c.610—546 BCE)



Anaximander was the author of the first surviving lines of Western philosophy. He speculated and argued about “the Boundless” as the origin of all that is. He also worked on the fields of what we now call geography and biology. Moreover, Anaximander was the first speculative astronomer. He originated the world-picture of the open universe, which replaced the closed universe of the celestial vault.

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### 1. Life and Sources

The history of written Greek philosophy starts with Anaximander of Miletus in Asia Minor, a fellow-citizen of [Thales](#). He was the first who dared to write a treatise in prose, which has been called traditionally *On Nature*. This book has been lost, although it probably was available in the library of the Lyceum at the times of [Aristotle](#) and his successor [Theophrastus](#). It is said that Apollodorus, in the second century BCE, stumbled upon a copy of it, perhaps in the famous library of Alexandria. Recently, evidence has appeared that it was part of the collection of the library of Taormina in Sicily, where a fragment of a catalogue has been found, on which Anaximander’s name can be read. Only one fragment of the book has come down to us, quoted by Simplicius (after [Theophrastus](#)), in the sixth century AD. It is perhaps the most famous and most discussed phrase in the history of philosophy.

We also know very little of Anaximander’s life. He is said to have led a mission that founded a colony called Apollonia on the coast of the Black Sea. He also probably introduced the gnomon (a perpendicular sun-dial) into Greece and erected one in Sparta. So he seems to have been a much-traveled man, which is not astonishing, as the Milesians were known to be audacious sailors. It is also reported that he displayed solemn manners and wore pompous garments. Most of the information on Anaximander comes from [Aristotle](#) and his pupil [Theophrastus](#), whose book on the history of philosophy was used, excerpted, and quoted by many other authors, the so-called doxographers, before it was lost. Sometimes, in these texts words or expressions appear that can with some certainty be ascribed to Anaximander himself. Relatively many testimonies, approximately one third of them, have to do with astronomical and cosmological questions. Hermann Diels and Walter Kranz have edited the doxography (A) and the existing texts