Early Ionic Philosophy

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When we speak of the Ionic Philosophy…we do not mean to imply that the representatives of this Philosophy form what is called a "Philosophic School" in the strict sense of this term. There was no center among them from which a common movement of thought spread abroad. We have to do only with a number of Philosophers who had a common subject of investigation—Nature, and whose philosophic views had certain common characters. These Philosophers do not even belong without exception to the Ionian race. They do not form a sect acknowledging one founder whose doctrines they uphold; and therefore it is only by a somewhat strained use of the term that we can speak of an "Ionic School."

We can, however, divide these Philosophers of Nature into two classes—the earlier and the later. The earlier (Ionic "Physiologists," *phusiologoi*) are the representatives of the Greek Philosophy of Nature in its rudimentary stage; while the later, having before them the works as well of the earlier Ionic Philosophers as of the Pythagoreans and Eleatics, were enabled to give this Philosophy a wider development. It is, however, worth noticing that the earlier Ionic Philosophers for the most part adopted a dynamical principle to explain the origin of things, while the later as generally incline to mechanical conceptions.

The earlier Ionic Philosophers had this in common, that in their inquiry as to how things in nature come into being and cease to be, they identified the active and the passive principles, the *causa efficiens* and the *causa materialis*, and strove to explain the rise of the order of nature by a dynamical process from this principle. Their doctrines are thus fundamentally forms of Hylozoism (Doctrine of Animated Matter). Amongst the earlier Ionic Philosophers are to be numbered Thales of Miletus, Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Diogenes of Apollonia, whose theories bear chiefly on the primal material basis of all things; and Heraclitus who concerned himself mainly with the processes of origin and decay.

Thales of Miletus

Thales of Miletus, of Phoenician extraction, born B.C. 640, is described by Aristotle (Met 1. 3.) as the founder of the Ionic Philosophy, and so the founder of Greek Philosophy as a whole. He is said to have studied Geometry in Greece; at least Proclus makes this statement regarding him (on Euclid, p. 19). He is furthermore credited with having foretold an eclipse of the sun which occurred during the reign of the Lydian King, Alyattes.

The fundamental theory of his Philosophy of Nature may be thus stated: Out of water all things are made. Water is the primal matter, and with this primal matter, the force which is active in nature is identified. From this primal matter, probably by a process of rarefaction or condensation, he derives the origin of all things. According to Aristotle (Met. 1. 3.) "Thales was perhaps led to this opinion by observing that the nutriment of all things is moist, that heat itself, by which living things are maintained in life, is educed from moisture, — but that from which another thing is derived is a principle of that other thing — and further by observing that

the seed (from which living organisms spring) is of its nature moist. But the principle making moist objects moist is water." In consequence of this view Thales could regard all things as penetrated and vivified by the Divine power, and in this sense could say that the gods filled all things. (Arist. de anim. 1. 5.) He held the magnet to be animated because of its attraction of iron. He was of opinion that the earth floated upon water.

In later times Hippo of Samos or of Rhegium—a Physicist of the time of Pericles, who seems to have lived for a considerable time at Athens, adopted the theory of Thales. He discovers in water, or the moist element, the ultimate principle of all things. He does not seem to have attracted much attention. Aristotle mentions him but seldom, and not always in terms of praise. (De anim. 1. 2. Met. 1. 3.)

Anaximander

Anaximander of Miletus (born about B.C. 611), was the first of the Greeks to compose a treatise "On Nature." The primal basis of all being (*arche*), and out of which all things came forth is, in his view, the Unlimited (*to apeiron*). From this *apeiron* all things derive their origin. At first it differentiates itself into the opposing elements, hot and cold, moist and dry—kindred elements standing in antithesis. "As a result of a perpetual movement of revolution, condensations of the air are effected, and in this way numberless worlds come into being—heavenly divinities—in the midst of which the earth, cylindrical in form, maintains itself at rest owing to its being equally distant from all points of the heavenly sphere." The earth was evolved from the primeval moisture under the influence of heat emanating from the sun, and, fecundated by heat, it gave birth to living beings. The latter thus derive their being from the element of moisture, and this explains why the creatures now living on the land were originally of the fish kind, and acquired their present form only as the surface of the earth became dry. It is said that Anaximander described the soul as of gaseous nature. All things come forth from the *apeiron* and all things are fated to return to it again.

With regard to the question, what Anaximander really meant by the *apeiron*, opinions are divided. Some (Ritter) maintain that he understood by the term a congeries of the primary elements; that the origin of things from the *apeiron* is nothing more than a separation of elements, and that thus the evolution of the order of nature is, in his theory, a purely mechanical process. Others (Herbart) are of opinion that Anaximander meant by the *apeiron* a primary matter indeterminate in quality and unlimited in quantity, and that he thus conceived the evolution of the natural order to be a dynamical process. Aristotle, it must be admitted, speaks of a *migma Anaximandrou* (Met. 12. 2.), but he also mentions (Phys. 3. 4.) that Anaximander taught that the *apeiron* was divine, embracing all and controlling all—a notion which best accords with a dynamical theory. The latter was more probably the theory of this Philosopher. It would, however, appear that Anaximander was not very explicit in his teaching as to the nature of the *apeiron*, and that Aristotle was thus unable to set forth his doctrines with assured accuracy.

Anaximenes

Anaximenes of Miletus, a successor of Anaximander, perhaps his pupil (about B.C. 528), held air to be the primary principle of all things. "As the soul within us," he says, "which is air, holds our being together, so does the breath and the air embrace the world." (Stob. Eclog. Phys. p. 296). This air, infinite in extension, is instinct with life, i.e., it is not merely the material, it is also the efficient cause of all things. Out of this primary being, by the process of condensation

(*puknôsis*) and rarefaction (*manôsis* or *araiôsis*) are derived all other things—fire, wind, clouds, water, earth. The earth—a smooth mass of circular outline, and the earliest of the formations of the Universe—is supported by the air. Anaximander describes this infinite primal principle of things as the Deity, though he also speaks of other gods who have derived their being from it.

Diogenes of Apollonia

This view of Anaximenes, with regard to the first principle of all things, was also held by Diogenes of Apollonia, a philosopher who lived in the fifth century before Christ. He holds the air to be the primary principle and permanent basis of all things. He discovers a proof that all substance is one in the fact of the assimilation by plants of the various elements of the earth's crust, and of the elements of the vegetable world by animal organisms (Simpl. in Phys. fol. 32 B). The same theories were held by another philosopher, Idaeus of Himera, of whom nothing further is known.

Heraclitus of Ephesus

Heraclitus, surnamed "The Obscure" (*ho skoteinos*), the most brilliant portion of whose career extended from B.C. 504 to B.C. 500, was a member of a noble family of Ephesus. His theory is hylozoistic, but his doctrine of the continual flux of all things gives special prominence to the restless activity of nature. We possess only fragmentary remains of his treatises *Peri phuseôs*.

Heraclitus holds Fire to be the ultimate principle of all things, but understands by the term an ethereal fire. This ether he, at the same time, regards as a divine spirit, which has knowledge of all things, and directs all things. In his view, therefore, the activity of the primal principle of all things is not a blind exercise of force, it is guided by reason, for he considers the eternal Fire-Spirit to be Reason, *logos*. He seems to have reached this conception from a consideration of the order and regularity prevailing throughout the universe. Reason is not, however, with him a transcendental entity; it is merely a determining attribute of the eternal material basis of things—of Fire. On this point he is distinctly at variance with the later philosopher of nature—Anaxagoras.

With regard to the origin of the world, Heraclitus teaches that by condensation all things are produced from Fire, and that by rarefaction all things return to it again. The process of condensation he describes as the way downwards (*hodos katô*), the process of rarefaction as the way upwards (*hodos anô*). The way downwards leads to Water and Earth, and so to Death; the way upwards leads to Air and Fire, and thus to Life. On the way downwards, too, lies Evil, and hence all things in the region of the earth are filled with evils; on the way upwards lies Good. Both sides of the dual process are, however, everywhere found in conjunction.

The forces at play in this dual process, and which initiate and maintain it, are, on the one hand, Strife and Hatred, on the other, Concord and Peace. By Strife and Hatred things come forth from the Primal Fire; by Harmony and Concord they return thither, Strife, or Enmity is, thus, the parent of all things (*polemos patêr pantôn*); the power of Peace and Concord, on the other hand, brings things into union, and guides them back to the principle from which they emanated. Both forces must, therefore, be regarded as cosmical powers, indwelling in the Primal Fire. The world itself is nothing more than the Deity differentiated.

In this theory, the whole course of nature is merely a continuous movement in a circle; the cosmical force Strife, brings things forth from the Primal Fire by the downward way; and then the cosmical force, Concord, restores them to the Ethereal Fire again. From such assumptions these conclusions are deduced:

(a.) All things in the world are in perpetual *flux;* there is nothing permanent, nothing

persistent. Everything is moving in a current (*panta hrei*). We cannot step twice into the same stream, says Heraclitus. No thing is at any one moment exactly the same thing that it was the moment before. The rotation of beginning to be and perishing is uninterrupted—All things pass.

(b.) The world has come forth from the Primal Fire because of the preponderance of Strife over Concord; but the time will come in which Concord shall gain the ascendency, and then the world shall be absorbed again into the fiery Ether. Not that the process will then be at an end: Strife will again become predominant, and a new world will arise, to be consumed again as before. And so the round of changes goes on for ever. The Deity, in sport, is ever constructing worlds, which it permits, in due time, to end in fire, only, however, to renew them again.

6. The Soul of man is of the nature of fire; the driest element is the wisest and the best; it shoots through the body as the lightning through the cloud. The Soul is, as it were, a wandering spark shot forth from that Universal Fire or Universal Reason, which encompasses heaven and rules all things, and it is maintained only by constant accessions from the source whence it came. It derives no advantage from its union with the material body; the birth of man is a misfortune, inasmuch as he is born only to die. It is only when the soul returns again to the Primal Fire that its true life begins.

7. Man is possessed of the gift of Reason only in as far as he is united with the Universal (Divine) Reason, and shares therein. Hence it is only in his waking hours that he is really a rational being; during sleep he is an irrational being, for his share in the Universal Reason is then limited to the mere function of respiration. These notions lead Heracitus these further conclusions: —

(a.) The senses are deceptive, they are worthless for the attainment of truth; truth is in the reason alone. Hence the estimate of the individual is not the standard of truth; that alone is true which all acknowledge as such, for that alone is an object of knowledge to the Universal (Divine) Reason. Herein lies the criterion of truth. Divergence of one's own opinion from the universal reason is to be avoided, for in this is the source of error.

(b.) The Divine Reason is the universal immutable law as well of the physical as of the moral world. All human laws are upheld by the Divine law, "for this can do all that it wills, and it satisfies all and overcomes all" (Stob. Serm. 3. 84). The people should, therefore, defend the law as the wall of a fortress, and stifle sell-asserting arrogance as they would a conflagration.

(c.) The *summum bonum* of man is Contentment (*euarestêsis*) or Equanimity, a condition of mind arising from the conviction that events happen precisely as they have been predetermined by the supreme law. For "it is not best for men that what they wish should come to pass. Sickness makes health a pleasure and an advantage; hunger, in like manner, prepares for satiety, and labour for rest" (Stob. Serm. 3. 83, 84). Contented resignation to the universal and necessary course of events is the secret of human happiness.

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