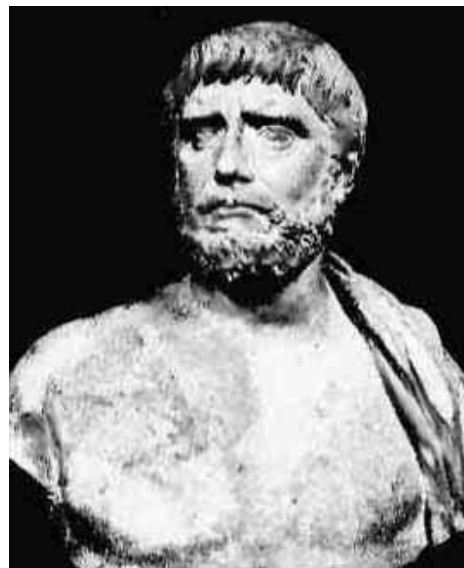


The Pre-Socratic Launch

The 6th and 5th Centuries B.C.E.



Miletus in Ionic Greece (now Turkey)



“All of our discourse should begin with a reference to Thales.”

~ A Letter (alleged to be) from Anaximenes to Pythagoras Cited by Diogenes Laertius (D.L. II:4)

“THE PRE-SOCRATIC LAUNCH”

CHRONOLOGY: 6th c. – 5th c. BCE. **GEOGRAPHY:** Asia Minor, Greek World, Levant

We credit ‘**Thales & Company**’ with breaking away from ancient mythologies and dispatching the course of Western **Science** and **Philosophy:** (Our Intellectual Heritage and secular Worldview Background.)

Their Main Question:

What is the “**basic stuff**” of reality? This is asking: What is the **permanent** entity which lies beneath the various **ever-changing** things? Is there an elemental **Unity** behind all the **Diversity**?


“My view, to sum it all up: *all things* are differentiations of the *same thing*...and this is obvious.”
~ Diogenes, student of Anaximenes

Even this early in our history of philosophy, intriguing **dilemmas** and **paradoxes** were being exposed. These issues are *still* relevant (and *still* perplexing) for Theoretical Physics and Theology, WVs, *etc.*

The Seen vs. the Unseen Change vs. Permanence Matter vs. Form
Appearance vs. Reality (an Epistemological problem)
One vs. Many (Monism vs. Pluralism)
Senses vs. Pure Reason (as we’ll see later — “Empiricism vs. Rationalism”)

Their Place in the Hall of Fame:

We may honor the Pre-Socratic nature philosophers with launching our intellectual voyage. But to the people of their own time, they left a tendency toward **SCEPTICISM**...even confusion! It’s one thing to “Topple Zeus”...it’s another to offer more complete and satisfying accounts of reality. The Pre-Socratics’ attempts to explain reality by observing Nature and describing it **IM-personally** made the Homeric gods & goddesses seem rather superfluous. Thus, they forced following generations to ‘aim higher’ or to look within, or to become even more thoroughly Naturalistic.

In the **next era**, which is the stellar “**Golden Age**” of Philosophy, Plato and Aristotle devise impressive metaphysical SYSTEMS, and they establish brilliant academies that last for many centuries.  Plato is “transcendent” and Aristotle is Aristotle. (You’ll get that later.)

Read on...and try to enjoy the high drama of finite humans trying to grasp Reality.

You now embark on an intellectual Time Machine voyage!

Follow the “Influence Trail”:

Pythagoras on Plato. (Form is perfect and Matter is imperfect)

Heraclitus on the Stoics. (The “Logos-Fire” as ultimate reality, the ‘intelligence’ steering all things)

Democritus’ Atomism on Epicurus. (Materialism)

Extra: (Not in the Textbook)

One fascinating thinker is **XENOPHONES** of Colophon (570—478 BCE)

He criticized the gods of Greek mythology for being immoral, and said that cultures create gods in their own image! He even suggested that there is One God beyond these anthropomorphic counterfeits who is eternal, immutable and immovable (cf.—Aristotle’s “Prime Mover”) who sets things in motion by intelligent will power. This God would be in no way similar to mortals.

CONNECTION TO OUR WORLDVIEW STUDIES

Related issues:

What can we discover about the Origins of the Cosmos? What are the primal or elemental tid-bits of matter? And Natural Laws — Can they be prior to the Nature that obeys them? Are they deterministic? These amazing Pre-Socratics devised early notions of Atomic Theory, Evolution, Cosmic Cycles, and even the mysterious nature of Numbers. They even asked WHY, not just the WHAT and HOW of existence. They were seeking Wisdom *and* contriving Worldview paradigms a very long time ago.

☞ Notice that these metaphysical and cosmological questions are like **Q1** and **Q2** of the **7BQs!**

Interesting comparisons:

How would Parmenidean Monism or the Pythagorean idea of Reincarnation compare with Eastern religious ideas?

In Theoretical Physics today—are we Heraclitian (everything is continual change & motion and stability is an illusion) or Parmenidean (everything is pure Being and motion/change is an illusion)? Quantum theory says that our ordinary concepts of space and time do completely break down at some point!

Discussion Questions:

Was it a really such a ‘clean break’ from **MYTHOS** to **LOGOS** (from supernatural to naturalistic explanations?)

Thales said: “Everything is full of gods.” Anaximenes said: “Air is a god.” Pythagoras was a cult leader, later deified by his followers. Heraclitus seems to have given ‘divine’ status to his eternal Logos fire. Parmenides, the pure rationalist, wrote a long poem about being led from darkness to enlightenment by the goddess of wisdom who showed him the true nature of reality. The ‘Nous’ or ‘Mind’ Anaxagoras posited could be something like the “god” of the “Intelligent Design” movement today, as could Xenophanes’ idea of One God beyond the capricious man-made gods. *Hmmm.*

Intriguing questions arise from the alleged **Mythos** ⇔ **Logos** paradigm shift:

Is Scientism really just a modern Mythology?

Can Nature explain Nature from within Nature?

Is mankind incorrigibly “religious”? Why might that be?

If Nature is all there is, why do we tend to personalize, if not deify it?!

It is quite amazing that these 6th & 5th c. BCE *proto-scientists* exposed so many **epistemological** puzzles and **metaphysical** mysteries. These are the very same “boundary issues” STILL relevant in today’s Science and Faith Dialogue.

You may come to see that after **2600** years of philosophy, science, and intellectual inquiry in every academic discipline — this humbling question remains:

Can the vast Cosmos explain itself, or, is it reasonable to admit a need for trustworthy Revelation?



Someone come tell me which quote given in the pages ahead addresses this question.

For Further Study:

From the Pre-Socratics to the Present by the always fun to read Professor Daniel Kolak (Mayfield, 1998)

Pre-Socratic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction by Catherine Osborne (Oxford University Press, 2004)

The Great Conversation, 5th ed. by Norman Melchert See Chapter 2. *It is great!* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

We are about to commence on a truly **COSMIC** Voyage!

OUR COSMIC VOYAGE

The Greek word *kosmos* means ‘**ordered whole.**’ And they used *kosmos* to refer to ‘**the whole world.**’ But what establishes such orderliness? Natural laws? From whence would such laws derive? Destiny? Fate? Inherent rational necessity? Logos? Divine command? From whence did the world arise? Is it eternal? What is ultimate in the world? Is there a God or gods? Is there a permanence that holds the constant changes together? Is there a reality truly there behind what appears to be there? How can we know? Is our mind related to the cosmos? What should we do? What is the meaning and purpose of all this?

The Cosmos inspires wonder...and *philosophy begins in wonder.*

The History of Philosophy is a Cosmic Voyage.



The people of many cultures had perhaps asked some of the same questions above...and answers were imparted in folk myths or imposed by religious authorities. All great ancient civilizations produced ‘religious systems’ along with government, commerce and art. India is supposed to have the oldest recorded philosophy, but it was always tied to polytheism or pantheism and the priestly caste. The Chinese had Confucius (551—475 BCE) who offered social theory and ethics, but not much epistemology & logic, and no metaphysical system. Israel of course, had their matchless ethical monotheism, covenant Peoplehood, prophetic justice, divine revelation and redemptive history.

But it is back to the Greeks of the 6th century BCE that we trace our story of Philosophy and its offspring Science...(which was called Natural Philosophy until modern times!) These intrepid cosmic explorers sought naturalistic explanations to the questions and inspired discourse that continues today.

Indeed, what makes the many-splendored cosmos, not just orderly, but an entirety. Is there a One behind the Many? Is Everything ultimately reducible to One thing? (Or is the world not a ‘thing’ at all?!)

Thales is the first philosopher we study. He believed there is an underlying unity behind the plurality.

“Ultimately, everything is made of one single substance. He calls this universal substance ‘*water.*’ If you think this idea is scientifically naïve, consider this: for the next twenty-five centuries, the whole history and development of philosophy and science has altered Thales’ statement by only one word! That history goes:

Everything is made of water.

Everything is made of air. (If he had said “dissociated hydrogen gas” he’d have followers today.)

Everything is made of the indeterminate “Boundless.” (If he’d said Brahman without attributes...well, you get the idea.)

Everything is made of logos fire.

Everything is made of numerical relationships.

Everything is made of atoms.

Everything is made of quarks (sub-atomic particles.)

Everything is made of energy.”

Daniel Kolak *From the Pre-Socratics to the Present*, p.8.

To this list, add a few oddities like Nicolas of Cusa’s “Everything is Everything” or Berkeley’s “Everything is idea” or the Eastern teaching that everything is illusion except God...and you’ll see that we have quite a mind-stretching voyage ahead in this meager course! If asked what this course is about...Say ‘**Everything!**’

To Inspire You on Your Journey through the Ages
Or – Why You Should Love the History of Philosophy



All the Eras are at Your Service.



Examine them and Truly Live!

The following quotes are intended to invigorate you. *五*

LIFE IS FOR PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHY IS FOR LIFE

Other disciplines deal with **timely** issues. Philosophy poses **timeless** questions. Remember the professor's speech in "Dead Poet's Society"? Likewise...other majors may train you to 'make a living' but philosophy will ask why you bother!

Other professions may serve to sustain life, but we must also examine *what life is*.

Therefore, if someone asks you why you are spending so much time studying philosophy, answer them saying: "*Because I am a human being who **truly lives!***"

"The only people who are really at leisure are those who take time for philosophy.
They alone truly LIVE!

It is not for their lifetime alone of which they are careful stewards. They connect *every age* to their own.

Unless we are ungrateful, we see that it was for us that the illustrious founders of divine schools of thought came into being...they prepared for us a way of life.

No age is forbidden to us...we have admittance to them all. And if we choose to transcend the narrow bounds of human weakness by loftiness of mind, there is a vast stretch of time for us to roam.

We may dispute with Socrates, doubt with Carneades, relax with Epicurus, transcend human nature with the Stoics and even defy it with the Cynics.

Since we are able by nature to participate in *any age*, shouldn't we mentally lift ourselves from this petty and ephemeral span up to the boundless and timeless region that we can share with our betters?

The philosopher's life is therefore spacious. He is not hemmed in and constricted like others, because *all ages* are at his service." ~ Seneca (1st c. Stoic Philosopher)



Aristotle and a Bust of Homer
Rembrandt

What Can All This Philosophy Do For Me?

“The busy student may ask, ‘*is all this philosophy useful to me?*’ What a shameful question! We do not ask it of other imaginative models. Models that enable us to access this wondrous world. This world that we only *incompletely* know.

Untaught eyes miss the wonders of the world...isn't that reason enough to seek learning?

Philosophy can yield wisdom that is *worth more* than material wealth and earthly power.

Even if it doesn't make us richer, it can help us to care *less* about riches than we care about truth, beauty, and justice! For what if we were to fatten our purses or even win elections and yet remain selfish, coarse, brutish, and unstable.

We are so slovenly and self-contradictory in how we *think* and in how we then *live*.

If we are faithful students, Philosophy can give us a healing unity of mind and soul, and can build integrity of character and goals. Philosophy can confer order and dignity to our lives.”

Lightly paraphrased from Will Durant's “*The Mansions of Philosophy*”



Life without philosophy is inconceivable...for the unexamined life is not worth living. ~ Socrates

A philosopher is a spectator of time and eternity. ~ Plato

Philosophy begins in wonder. ~ Aristotle

Do not ask what you can do with philosophy; ask what philosophy can do with you! ~ Heidegger

☞ WHAT IS THIS PURSUIT CALLED ‘PHILOSOPHY’? ☞

A philosopher loves what is wise and pursues truth. ☞ Pythagoras ☞ **Philosophy** is to Science what **Wisdom** is to Knowledge. ☞

Philosophy is the discipline that considers truth. ☞ Aristotle All those whose hearts are fixed on Reality itself deserve the title ‘Philosopher.’ ☞ Plato

There is only one wisdom — to recognize the Intelligence who steers all things through all things. ☞ Heraclitus

Philosophy is a full-scale quest to find the underlying principle *and* the true meaning of Existence. Science asks *what* and *how*...philosophy asks **‘WHY?’**

Philosophy is human thought become self-conscious. (Humans thinking quite deliberately about the fact that they are thinking!)

Philosophical topics are: Life, the Universe, and Everything. ☞ From the preface to the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*

Philosophy is the formal disciplined attempt to comprehend the whole of reality, *and* to then live in virtuous harmonious accord with reality.

“There is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out.” ☞ Hamlet II: 2

Philosophy is the **art of thinking and questioning**. It asks what thought *is*, and questions the questions! It is literally *the study of all studies!*

It gave rise to all the other academic disciplines, and like a good grand-parent it may still offer guidance to them.

The more rational we are, the more we should recognize both the limit and the only possible source of human rationality.

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy.” ☞ Hamlet I: 5

Philosophy cannot be taught, it must be ‘caught’ from someone already infected. To learn to philosophize you must argue with a philosopher. ☞ Elmer Sprague

I do not know how to teach philosophy without becoming a disturber of the peace. ☞ Baruch Spinoza

The point of philosophy: start with something so simple as to seem not worth stating, end with something so paradoxical as to not be believed. ☞ Bertrand Russell

The whole person within us is at work when we do philosophy. ☞ William James Philosophy is silent dialogue between the soul and itself. ☞ Plato

Let no one delay the study of philosophy while young nor weary of it when old. ☞ Epicurus

Beware when God lets loose a thinker on this planet. Then all things are at risk. ☞ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Philosophy is **‘IDEA POWER’** and such a force can impact human culture as no other discipline has the power to do.

The history of philosophy is a sustained conversation among the most stellar thinkers who ever lived. (Norman Melchert’s textbook is *The Great Conversation*)

If you do not understand the meaning of what you are hearing, and the one speaking does not understand what he is saying — *that* is philosophy. ☞ Voltaire

Philosophy is an orchard: with **Metaphysics** as the soil, **Physics** as the plants, **Logic** as the fence guarding them, and **Ethics** as the fruit of the trees. ☞ Zeno

The crucial task of philosophy: To slice through thick layers of myth, rhetoric, theory and dogma, locate any uncritically held assumptions, and lay them bare.

“Hang philosophy! ♥ Unless philosophy can make a Juliet.” ☞ Romeo & Juliet III: 3

“There never was a philosopher that could endure the toothache patiently.” ☞ Much Ado About Nothing V: 1

I became a philosopher thanks to my parents. They wanted me to be a concert pianist. 🎹 🎹 **Philosophy is the highest music.** ☞ Plato

As history is the study of other people’s mistakes, philosophy is the study of other people’s misconceptions. ☞ Phillip Guedala

The western philosophical tradition has subordinated truth to politics and therefore may constitute a highly sophisticated form of male-dominated propaganda. ☞ Alison Jagger

“The philosophy of one era is the common sense of the next.” ☞ Found in a fortune cookie

By the twentieth century, philosophy abdicated its lofty position and abandoned its quest. It ‘deconstructed’ itself. What now, Socrates?

Philosophy is the ardent pursuit of how to be unhappy more intelligently.

Philosophy exhibits the near illimitable giftedness of the human mind. At the very same time it exposes the finite human’s need for divine revelation.

Philosophy begins in wonder. And in the end, when philosophical inquiry has done its best, the wonder remains. ☞ Alfred North Whitehead

A little philosophy makes a man an atheist; a great deal turns him to religion. ☞ Francis Bacon

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding.
To Him belongs eternal praise.” ☞ Ps. 111: 10

THIS IS OUR 'CLASS PICTURE'!
LET IT STAND AS AN EMBLEM FOR THE
HISTORY PORTION OF THIS PHILOSOPHY COURSE.
MAY IT BE AN INSPIRATION FOR ALL AGES!



YOU WILL GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS FAMOUS FRESCO
IN THE NEXT SECTION.