

Genealogy of Ancient Philosophy in View of the “Great Quarrel”: Towards an Expository Essay

By Dagnachew Desta*

This article attempts to offer a critical account of the genealogy of ancient Greek philosophy in its bid to transcend the old ruling mythopoeic culture. With this in mind, emphasis is given more to the speculative character of Greek thought rather than its technical and detailed aspects. In my account of the origin of Greek philosophy, I use Plato’s famous pronouncement (Plato, The Republic, Tenth Book) about the great quarrel between philosophy and poetry as a context to provide my analysis. In dealing with the question at hand, I develop the following interrelated claims. First, Greek philosophy made its appearance in the struggle against the mythical background. Here, even though early philosophy tried to move beyond myth, it did not completely transcend the world of mythology. Second, in dealing directly with the quarrel, I identify two issues (problems) as the basis of the conflict: A) the essence of the divine and B) the nature of the universe. Third, I sum up my article by making the following claims.

- 1) *Greek philosophy took the crucial step in trying to explain the cosmos (world) by introducing a single fundamental principle.*
- 2) *The transition from traditional mythology to a rational account of the origin and nature of the universe is not the work of a single thinker but the effort of many philosophers over the generations.*
- 3) *A proper account of the transition is best explained if we approach it as a result of the process of “continuity in discontinuity”.*
- 4) *Early, Philosophy is not so much about the triumph of reason and science, but the conceptualization and differentiation of mythic cultures. Thus in a way, Greek philosophy emerged along with mythic culture against ‘mythic culture’ at the same time.*

Keywords: *physis, nomos, arche, physiology, aperion, mythology, anthropomorphic*

Introduction

The central purpose of this article is to examine the beginning of ancient Greek philosophy in its endeavor to move away from ‘myth’ to a ‘rational’ view of the world. There are obviously different approaches to address this issue. On my part, I shall pursue my exploration by focusing on Plato’s allusion to the “great quarrel” between philosophy and poetry. I use the ‘quarrel’ as a thread to maintain the unity and perspective of my investigation.

I submit that when we delve deeper into the particular details of the quarrel, we shall see clearly that Greek philosophy is “a bridge between the world of myth and philosophy”. Before, I embark on the direct thematic structure of my paper; I would like to add the following preliminary points to my account. First, there is no

*Assistant Professor, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

doubt that philosophy emerged after subjecting mythology to some sort of philosophical investigation. Second, in spite of such a trend though, the deeply seated tension between poetry and philosophy should not be perceived merely as conflictual and antagonistic.

The main theme of the first section is centered on the question of human and divine knowledge. Here, we shall see how the dependence of the poets on the gods as the source of knowledge is progressively shifted to the phenomena of human "self-effort".

The second part involves mainly about the issue of the "discovery of nature by the philosophers". In this connection, emphasis is given to the introduction of the concept of 'regularity' and 'inevitability' in nature. I submit that the idea of regularity is introduced along with the overthrow of the notion of supernatural forces as pivotal power that "steers and shapes the world".

In the third part, I offer my own conclusion about the issue at hand. When we link together the various elements that we've assessed so far, I believe that the following viewpoints stand out unmistakably. First, there is no doubt that ancient philosophy moved away from mythical presentation to some sort of rational account of the world. Second, the difference between myth and philosophy is not clearly demarcated to warrant a radical break between the two traditions.

The Great Quarrel

Plato declared that there was an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry. Whatever may be taught of Plato's pronouncement, we find without doubt traces of "poetical imagery" in philosophy and "conversely, there are few of the great Greek poets in whom we don't meet with reflections indicative of a decidedly philosophical habit of mind" (Adam 1965, p. 3). In any case, the obvious question we face is that given the presence of philosophy and poetry in each camp, how do we account for the source of the quarrel?

In order to address this question, we have to revisit in some detail the contentious basis of their rivalry. Most agree that the "quarrel" wrests: A) on the question and essence of the 'divine' and B) on the origin and nature of the universe (cosmos).

In what follows, I shall come to the details of the quarrel using three outstanding scholars in classics, philology, and history of philosophy. I believe that these thinkers namely Bruno Snell (*The Discovery of the Mind*); Hans Georg-Gadamer (*Beginning of Philosophy*) Charles H. Kahn (*The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*) have rich knowledge and clear insight into the problem I'm addressing at this juncture. In addition, I would also like to mention here, that I've immensely benefited from attending the lectures of Hans-George Gadamer and C. H. Kahn on the general subject of Greek philosophy that was offered at Boston College.

(I)

Charles H. Kahn

Wherever we speak about the pre-Socratics, we find two opposing views that have existed side by side albeit in critical tension for a long period. The first tradition: - is known as “popular tradition” which is primarily represented by poets, bards, sages, etc. Solon could be taken as exemplary of this school since he was a poet and sage at the same time.

The second perspective consists of the new scientific culture that originated around five century B.C. Accordingly, this movement is supposed to represent the first wave of enlightenment.

To be sure, both traditions share an underlying assumption about the concept of the divine. They (poets and philosophers) accept the fundamental difference that lies between the divine and the human. The divine is perceived to be superior in many respects in that even when the gods are perceived to have a human form their superior nature in almost all things compared with human beings is maintained. Human nature for example is finite and hence chiefly characterized by its mortality. Both traditions also believe that the divine is an important ground for interpreting and understanding Greek culture.

Here though, even when they agreed on the superior nature and importance of the gods, the philosophers refused to embrace the perception of the gods as “divine genealogies and family connection” (Kahn, 1983, p. 11), who governs the universe as they see fit. In contradistinction to the poets, the philosophers postulated an alternative “ruling principle” that reduced the ability of the gods to intervene in the affairs of mortals and the universe alike.

Ethics

On the ethical front, we also find a shift from the Homeric perspective to a new moral ideal of the philosophers. The transformation of values took place around the concept of ‘Arete’. We find two leading principles of Homeric Arete: The first moral maxim exhorts “always be first and best and ahead of everyone else” (Kahn 1983, p. 12). The second maxim calls for a Homeric hero: “to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds” (Kahn 1983, p. 12). Both ideals go on to emphasize individual achievement which glorifies military and athletic prowess.

The other moral ideal is developed around the notion of “Sophrosyne”: we find “in epic poetry sophrosyne (in its old form saophresyne) has the literal meaning of ‘good sense’ or ‘soundness of mind; the opposite of folly...” (Kahn 1983, p. 13).

This is quite the opposite of the Homeric concept of excellence. As opposed to the glorification of individual valor, the new moral ideal call for self-constraint and moderation. Thus, an appeal to self-knowledge, temperance, and the rejection of excess of any kind is promoted in this moral ideal. In sum, a clear distinction between individual and social virtue emerged with the notion of Sophrosine, i.e., “the virtue of achievement was constrained by the virtue of self-restraint. In sum,

“the important fact is that both views, the selfish and the social conception of *Arête*, and the deep tension between the two, were there in the moral blood stream of the Greeks long before philosophy appeared on the scene” (Kahn 1983, p. 14).

Law

Later a new form of tension arose following the discovery of the division between ‘*Physis*’ and ‘*Nomos*’. After identifying *physis* as the basis of all normative values, the new thinkers rejected the moral belief that is grounded on *Nomos*. As far as the concept of ‘*Law*’ goes, we find two similar and yet different notions and attitudes. Consider Hesiod and Heraclitus who respectively represent the old and the new school. Hesiod: - adheres to Zeus’s order to follow justice and avoid violence: “For to fish and beasts and winged birds he gave the rule (*nomos*) that they eat one another, since there is no justice among them; but to human beings, he gave justice (*dike*)” (Kahn 1983, p. 15). Thus, the animal world is not governed by the rule (*nomos*) where they eat one another since the concept of justice does not apply to them.

When it comes to Heraclitus who represents the new tradition “justice applies to every manifestation of the cosmic order” (Kahn 1983, p. 15). Hence, we find the first theoretical salvo that laid the ground for the natural law theory.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

The Romantics interest and emphasis in studying original texts lade scholars to examine the ‘pre-Socratics’ in a new light. In this connection, credit should be given to Hegel and Schleiermacher.

Hegel as it is well known was a great philosopher and a great historian of philosophy. The pre-Socratic’s received particular attention in his famous lectures on the history of philosophy. Most agree that “the historical research into classical philosophy began with Hegel in the nineteen centuries” (Gadamer 1998, p. 11). Schleiermacher also introduced a new approach to the study of classical philosophy: - “He displayed not only great erudition but dialectical and speculative thinking that combined with impressive classical and humanistic erudition” (Gadamer 1998, p. 12).

Whenever we are engaged in formulating the beginning of philosophy, we ought to have some clarity about its meaning. Here, we believe that Plato is useful to start our probing: - he defined philosophy “as a sheer striving after wisdom or truth” (Gadamer 1988, p. 15). Hence, philosophy received its permanent feature of not being about ‘possession’ but rather about a quest for knowledge. In this regard, the philosopher is mainly the one who is engaged in theoretical contemplation (Aristotle). Consider Anaxagoras – when asked what he understood about happiness, he replied that happiness for him is nothing but meditation about the stars.

The Pre-Socratic philosophy is closely associated with the concept of ‘*principium*’: there is general agreement that the Pre-Socratics are the ‘*principium*’ of Western speculation. What does ‘*principium*’ mean? We find different interpretations of the concept in the tradition. For instance, the Greek term ‘*Arche*’ carries two notions of *principium* i.e., temporal and speculative or origin and

logical respectively. When we come out of the Greek usage and move to scholastic tradition, 'principium' literary means philosophy.

Leaving out the different and varying definitions of the term, let us confine ourselves, "to the meaning of "principium" in the sense of "beginning" (Gadamer 1988, p. 13). Now, when did pre-Socratic philosophy begin? In his account, "Aristotle also mentioned Homer and Hesiod, the first "theologizing" authors, and it may be correct that the great epic tradition already represents a step along the path toward the rational explanation of life and the world, a step that is then fully initiated by the pre-Socratic" (Gadamer 1998, p. 13).

This description may reasonably be taken to be true, but when we probe further into "far more obscure precursor we find "language, spoken by the Greeks" (Gadamer 1998, p. 13) as the "principium" of Greek philosophical culture. Since language is closely associated with poetry, we can develop this point by addressing the status of poetry and philosophy.

Poetry and Philosophy

'Theology' was the chief preoccupation of the mythopoeic tradition in ancient Greece. Most students of this period refer to it as the 'era of Homeric religion'. Here it is worth mentioning that Herodotus also credited Hesiod and Homer for "giving the Greeks their gods" what the historian meant was that they created "a unified image" of the scattered form of religion" (Gadamer 1985, p. 57).

Aristotle also called the ancient poets as the first 'theologians' who offered a comprehensive speech about the gods. As the term "myth" indicates, they were storytellers who spoke about the gods and offer dramatic narration about the human saga. It is commonly held that the rivalry between the two traditions began as rival representations of the image of the divine. Thus, the poetic and philosophic interpretation resulted in "endless rivalry throughout the whole history of Greek enlightenment" (Gadamer 1985, p. 59). With the rise of the new generation of thinkers, we encounter different narratives about the universe and the gods. Hence, we notice that the new way of speech about the gods "is what is later called philosophizing" (Gadamer 1985, p. 59).

This naturally put heavy pressure on the old school. On another front, the philosophers preferred theory over and above "mythology" which resulted in different and competing ways of experiencing and understanding reality. Here, we should be cautious not to view the relationship solely as external: whatever may be thought of the new thinkers, they were not scientific in the modern sense of the term. To be sure, their 'bold curiosity' and rational bent enabled them to come up with a new explication of the divine and cosmos.

Thus, Plato's designation (the great quarrel) was something to be taken seriously. As I have tried to show above, he was referring to the two contending schools i.e., between the mythopoeic and the rational way of interpreting the world. This is the first wave of enlightenment where "the struggle between the knowing of the divine and the knowing of reality played itself out" (Gadamer 1985, p. 59).

Bruno Snell

“Human nature has no knowledge but the divine nature has” (Snell 1982, p. 136).

The ancient Greeks believed that absolute knowledge is a special attribute of the gods. The divine’s exclusive monopoly of knowledge is quite obviously accepted by both the poetic and philosophic traditions. The belief in the acceptance of God as the sole owner of knowledge and wisdom run through the Pre-Socratic thinkers up to Plato and Aristotle.

The ancient Greeks believed that absolute knowledge is a special attribute of the gods. The divine’s exclusive monopoly of knowledge is quite obviously accepted by both the poetic and philosophic traditions.

Let’s begin with Homer’s well-known incantation: “Tell me now, Muse that dwell in the place of Olympus—For you are goddesses, you are at hand and know all things, But we hear only a rumor and no nothing-- who were the captains and lords of the Danaans” (Snell 1982, p. 136).

The poets have access through the muse to the voice of the divine. This communication was widely acknowledged in ancient times. It is believed that the muse provides the poets with information that they transform into their respective art. The ever-present muse enables the poets to recite (recount) historical events as if they were present when the story takes place. In the *Odyssey* Homer proudly states that “no one has taught me but myself, and the god has put into my heart all kinds of songs” (Snell 1982, p. 137).

The poet is dependent on the muse, he needs her council and advice to broaden and enrich his/her limited experience. Plato in the *IO* says “God takes away the mind of these men, and uses them as his ministers, just as he does soothsayers and godly seers, in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who utter these words ... but that it is God himself who speaks and address us through them” (Verdenius 1972, p. 4).

We should take Plato’s analysis of the poet’s divine inspiration with a few important qualifications: i) The gods do not reveal everything they know to human beings: Human beings should strive to attain ‘truth’ by their own effort. ii) Even though the poets receive counsel, wisdom, and divine message, it does not mean that he or she is “no more than a speaking tube in the mouth of the muse” (Verdenius 1972, p. 5).

This means, even though the poet is dependent on the divine and relays heavily on them, this does not mean that he/she slavishly “reproduces a divine message, but it is the result of a contract in which divine as well as human activities are involved” (Verdenius 1972, p. 5).

Hesiod

How did the poets and the philosophers see their relations with the Divine? Let us take briefly Hesiod, Xenophanes, and Heraclitus as representatives of the two rival traditions and review what they have to say about the issue at hand. Hesiod – begins his *Theogony* by making the following statement:

“Shepherds of the fields, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to say many false things as if they were true, but we know, when we will, how to utter true things” (Snell 1982, p. 138).

Hesiod confidently asserts that it was he that the muses selected to honor and provide him with a special gift to enrich his art. He strongly believes that he was endowed with a unique kind of talent that no one can match. His songs and poems were all the result of the instructions he had had from the muses. He took himself to be the chosen one in the sense that unlike most of his fellow rhapsode, he was the only one who is able to report the truth. He believes that way beyond the reach of other poets, he is the sole recipient of truth. On the other hand, he confidently asserts that the songs of other bards were replete with falsehood and untruth.

The Muses admit that “they know many false things which resemble the truth. In his case though, the Muses pass to him the truth. He considers himself special in that, “his knowledge in fine stands “halfway between the Devine knowledge of the muses and the human knowledge of the fools” (Snell 1982, p. 139).

Heraclitus

The move that rejected the Muses as the only source of knowledge was progressively continued by Heraclitus. Thus, unlike any thinker before him, he clearly advanced the theory that the muses were not, the main source or foundation of knowledge. He also made a significant shift in interpreting the divine “more abstractly as mind” and the “ultimate goal of human knowledge”. Before he explored his own position about human knowledge in general, he attacked the epistemic assumptions of the poetic tradition: He did so first in his rejection of the tradition of “polymathy” and in his critic of the senses.

For Heraclitus: “much learning (polymathy) does not teach anyone to have intelligence (noos); for else it would have taught. Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hecataeus” (Snell 1982, p. 144). Thus, to start with, he contends that the goal is not to seek to know many things but to understand the one principle that steers “all things”.

Second, even though philosophers must strive at attaining the knowledge of many things, Heraclitus believes that unless we have properly trained souls, we would undoubtedly fall into error. In one of his fragments, we are reminded that “eyes and ears are bad witnesses” for men if they have barbarian souls (Snell 1982, p. 145).

The Logos

When we move to his constructive side, we find the concept of logos to be at the heart of his philosophy. The logos is part material and part spiritual. It is “the fundament of which speech is only the super-structure” (Snell 1982, p. 144). It is neither ‘experience’ nor the message we receive from the Muse that gives us knowledge. For Heraclitus, way above and beyond human experience, the other dimension that enables us to attain knowledge is our own ability to participate or

“partake with the divine”. Thus, we need to be attentive and listen to the logos: “The Divine element is anchored in the depth of soul.” for this reason, he says “I searched into myself” (Snell 1982, p. 145).

In sum, he does not accept the idea of divine knowledge “who are present everywhere and have seen everything...” (Snell 1982, p. 144). Consequently, his thought shifted in another direction.

Xenophanes

Just as Homer and Hesiod represent the poetic tradition, Xenophanes could be taken as an exemplary figure of the new school. More than any other philosopher before him, he made a searching criticism of the vision of the divine that was prevalent at that time. Thus, it would be prudent to say a few words about this philosopher. Xenophanes: “was rhapsode who accomplished the extraordinary feat of putting the new Ionian world vision in the Homeric style, with Homeric worlds, even Homeric meter, thus replacing the great legends of gods and Heroes” (Gadamer 1988, p. 62). He was indeed a transitional figure who was able to divert the old representation of the divine without introducing a new language and a new style.

As mentioned above, his work stood as the most searching and thorough critic of the Homeric conception of the divine. He launched his criticism on two fronts: A) The relationship between the human and divine i.e., rejection of anthropomorphism. B) His persistent advice that Men should not rely solely on the divine for knowledge.

Anthropomorphism

Xenophanes was for the first time in the Western tradition heading towards philosophical monism. God, he said was all-knowing, non-visible, and free from physical attributes. Consider the following fragments.

- (a) “But mortal suppose that the gods are born (as they themselves are) and that they wear men’s clothing and have human voice and body”.
- (b) “But if cattle or lions had hands, so as to point with their hands and produce works of art as men do, they would point their gods give them bodies in form like their own-horses like horses, cattle like cattle”.
- (c) “God is one, suppose among gods and men and not like mortals in body or in mind” (Nahm 1964, pp. 84–85).

He ridiculed the image of the gods presented by the traditional wisdom – to do that, he employed the method of what is known as “reducto-absurdism”

- i) Men take the gods to be more or less similar to them. They impose their own image, character, and even physical attribute on the divine.
- ii) Different races white or black for that matter depict god as mirroring their own image.

- iii) Hence, animals too if given the opportunity would paint the gods like them.

Knowledge through Self-effort

Xenophanes agrees with Homer that firsthand experience has an epistemic advantage over another mode of knowing. Where he departs from him is in his sharp distinction between what is “reliably known and what is not”. Human beings’ luck “the shapes, what is clear, evident; only dikes” – thus what they have instead is appearance semblance of truth, and folly. In addition, Xenophanes goes much further and contends that “human knowledge is in its very essence deceptive” (Snell 1982, p. 139). As he put it: “truly the gods have not revealed to mortals all things from the beginning but by long seeking do men discover what is better” (Snell 1982, p. 139).

Men should try to acquire knowledge through their own effort – they may not achieve complete knowledge but the search should not stop. This perspective is quite new compared to the traditional view that relays heavenly on the ‘muse’ for knowledge. It should also be pointed out that the knowledge he seeks to attain is not the same type of knowledge that others try to acquire.

Xenophanes considers himself to stand between the divine and human in terms of knowledge. With the advent of the new thinkers, a new type of knowledge was thought. More importantly, they were seeking to discover a principle that does not mesh with obscurities and uncertainties.

(II)

Nature

According to Leo Strauss, the discovery of nature is the work of philosophy. He even goes further by claiming that “philosophy as distinguished from myth came into being when nature was discovered, or the first philosopher was the man who discovered nature” (Strauss 1965, p. 82). Indeed, this discovery enabled the early Greek thinkers to make an entrenched criticism of mythopoeic-culture on many fronts. For instance, once the division between ‘natural phenomena and non-natural phenomena’ is made, nature becomes an indispensable ground for ethical judgments. Now, as we have mentioned above, the second important issue of rivalry between the two traditions, (philosophy and poetry) was the phenomena of ‘nature’. Thus, it is now time to say a few explicit points about the issue.

To begin with, Aristotle named the “Milesians” “Physiologists” because of their widespread interest in understanding nature – its ‘physis’. They were the first thinkers to raise questions about the being of nature. The Greek term ‘physis’ is equivalent to the English word nature. The word comprises the totality of all sensible objects.

As it is well known, the philosophers have begun their inquiry with the study of nature. It is after they polished their method and approach by concentrating on

the external world that they turned their focus to the examination of the inner nature of man. It has been repeatedly asked why Greek philosophy began by inquiring into nature? Would it not have been more appropriate to start with the study of philosophical anthropology? Compared to the different variety of answers given by scholars, I find Werner Yager's suggestion to be far more plausible. In his replay, he began with Hegel's short but 'witty dictum': that the "mind moves in a roundabout way". Following that, he offers two interesting suggestions of his own: First, he says, we should remember that Greek speculation was pursued for the sake of *theoria* (Aristotle). Their inquiry was not motivated by any definable pragmatic goal. Hence, they found "nature" to be more attractive to engage in a disinterested manner than another subject. Second, our surprise springs from our own mistaken presupposition that perceive a radical distinction between natural philosophy "from the spirit of religious mysticism". Thus, when we refrain from construing poetry and prose as two unrelated entities, the philosophers' beginning point will not become problematic and difficult to understand.

The Milesian School

The first intellectual movement to establish a form of rationalism emerged in Greece (Ionia) around six century BC. The early thinkers were primarily engaged in answering the following questions: "What is the primary stuff from which the world is constituted?" and "How do the changes take place that brings about its manifold appearances?" (Wheelwright 1959, p. 4).

Thales

In the first volume of his classic book: *A History of Greek Philosophy* W.K.C. Guthrie introduced Thales in the following manner.

"Thales ought to be required as a forerunner, and that the first philosophical system of which we can say anything is that of Anaximander ...; but all that we have to suggest that he founded the Ionian school of philosophy is the simple affirmation of Aristotle who couples it with the bald statement that he regarded water as the underlying substance out of which all things are made" (Guthrie 1962, p. 45).

Indeed, he is considered to be by most scholars of ancient Greek philosophy to be the first thinker to depart from mythopoeic tradition. His importance lies as we shall try to show later in some detail: i) He took the essential and important step in trying to explain the origin of the universe by introducing one originative principle (*Arche*). In this respect, his bold and speculative moves to explain the universe by invoking a single principle led to an important step in the rise of philosophy. (ii) His attempt to explain 'nature' with the 'natural world phenomena, was quite novel and antithetical to the mythical account of the old tradition.

Thales advanced the thesis (claim) that "all things" start from water and also, the beginning of everything is water. It is so because he believes that individual things come and go but water endures. According to Aristotle: "Thales, the founder of this type of philosophy, says that it is water (and therefore declared that the earth

is on water), getting the idea, I suppose, because he saw that the nourishment of all things is moist, and that warmth itself is generated from moisture and persists in it (for that from which all things spring is the first principle of them); and getting the idea also from the fact the germs all beings are of a moist nature, while water is the first principle of the nature of what is moist” (Nahm 1964, p. 38).

Most interpreters agree that he selected water because he considers it as a source of life. To be sure, he was not the first thinker to associate the importance of water with life and other purposes. What is new with him is that he moved away from the mythical notion of ‘water’ to the familiar natural process.

Elsewhere, he also advanced the following baffling statement that “all things are full of gods”. Hear, even though commentators have given different interpretations about this particular expression, I find Aristotle’s comments to be more useful than others: “Thales” he says, “too seems, from what is recorded about him, to have regarded the soul as a motive force, since he said that the lodestone has a soul because it makes the iron move” (Kirk et al. 1983, p. 95).

Beginning with Aristotle most scholars agree that Thales’s epigram precipitates “a ‘hylozoistic’ view of the world, namely, that all matter (hyle) is embedded with life (zoe), that regard rivers, trees and so on somehow animated and inanimate by spirits” (Kirk et al. 1983, p. 96). In most cultural societies human “soul” is associated with “consciousness and life”. A person for example is considered alive so long as he or she displays movement of the bodily faculty. If one can’t do that, we say the person is soulless or, without life. Moreover, to the Greeks, god had two distinctive features – immortality and movement. For Thales, the world shows both characteristics, and hence true to his tradition, he claimed that the world is full of gods. In conclusion, Thales’s description of the world as “full of gods” by sharing Kirk and Raven two important observations:

- (i) First Thales, is claiming that whatever we see around us has a similar identity that cannot be clearly delineated into “inanimate and animate ‘entities since the world is ‘like a living organism’” (Kirk et al. 1983, p. 98).
- (ii) Second, his statement “that the world is full of gods” clearly establishes or marks the continuity between his taught and the mythological precedents. To be sure, even though we detect some ‘mythic formulations, at the end of the day, we cannot deny “the claims that he was the first philosopher” (Kirk et al. 1983, p. 99).

Anaximander

As we have mentioned before, the two important questions that preoccupied the ancient thinkers were: what is the fundamental stuff that the world is made up of and how is change possible? As Philip Wheelwright, a renowned scholar in the field noted Anaximander responded to this question in metaphysical, biological, and ethical manner.

Anaximander’s reply to the question rests in his introduction of a boundless entity from which countless things emerge. He named this originate source that lies behind the four “elements” (Fire, Air, Earth, and Water) as “Apeiron”. He says

it is something indeed emanate which he described by the Greek term Apeiron, which in general means 'boundless' or 'unlimited' (Luce 1992, p. 23). And what emanates from the Apeiron are contraries like the phenomena of warm and cold, health and sickness, etc.

As far as his biological view is concerned, he employed the analogy of an organism where birth and death exchange endlessly. Contraries exchange position when they reach their highest point in those qualities "gave way to the opposite qualities". The third important response is connected with the issue of ethics and justice. I believe that Anaximander's chief contribution to philosophy lays around this issue and hence warrants further treatment.

Ethics: The Universe Governed by Law

The chief source of Anaximander's teaching is Theophrastus. In his writings, we find an extended quote agreed by most scholars as the authentic statement of Anaximander.

"Anaximander... declared the Boundless to be principle and element of existing things, having been the first to introduce this very term of 'principle'; he says that it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some different, boundless nature, from which all the heavens arise and the kosmoi within them; 'out of those things whence is the generation for existing things, into these again does their destruction take place, according to what must need be; for they make amends and give reparation to one another for their offense, according to the ordinance of time,' speaking of them thus in rather poetical terms. It is clear that having observed the change of the four elements into one another, he did not think fit to make any one of these the material substratum, but something else besides these (Simplicius Phys. 24.13, after Theophrastus)" (Kahn 1974, p. 99).

I would like to mention at the outset that my interpretation closely follows the classic article of Charles H. Kahn titled: Anaximander Fragment: "The universe governed by Law".

Whenever 'things' overarch from their own allotted sphere; they would be forced by cosmic justice to restrain from their incursion. Anaximander contends that the "elements" are engulfed in endless incursions and reparation. The warring elements are the usual contraries namely hot and cold, light and darkness wet and dry, etc.

This mutual conflict and war with one another is to attain advantage and dominance over the other. When undue advantage is gained at the expense of the other, reparation follows "according to the ordinance or time". Thus, interminable strife and change of positions follow i.e., between victory and defeat, aggression and revenge, takes place in the nature of things. Thus, both man and nature are administrated by cosmic law.

Medicine

If we make a cursory look at the ancient medical literature, we also find the notion of “warring” ‘elements’ in the human body. Physicians allude to the rise and excess of an ‘element’ in the body that triggers sickness. What prompts the unhealthy condition is considered wrong. When medicine is administered, (given) “it is said to chastise another (Kolazein), or to avenge its intemperance (timorein)” (Kahn 1974, p. 100).

Plato

The language and approach of the physicians are repeated again in Plato’s Symposium. Plato claims that whenever the warring elements are harmonized with one another, a moment of amenable and healthy conditions would arise. On the other hand, whenever one element refuses to cooperate or blend with the other, it becomes the source of rivalry: in the words of Plato, when such antagonistic powers rule, they: “destroy many things and are the cause of harm. For plagues generally arise from such circumstances and many other irregular diseases for beasts and for plants as well. And indeed, frosts and hailstorms and plant blight come from the excessive and unruly lust of such things for one another” (Kahn 1974, p. 101).

In addition, Anaximander’s projection of warring function could also be extended to the phenomena of historical events as well. For instance, when a nation or a people transgress the right and property of others, wronged party is obliged to retaliate. This presentation implies a mutual exchange of crime, which naturally creates a debt that should be paid.

Conclusion

What is new with Anaximander? Is it as most claim his introduction of legal administration on the natural world? I think not for the following reason: It is commonly believed that there are two realms that exist side by side in the universe. The first comprises the human habitat which is administered by the rule of law. The second evolves the animal kingdom where lawlessness reigns.

This bifurcation between the human and the natural is alien to ancient cultures. They do not have the notion of a division between human society and the natural world. This division emerged later with the rise of Greek philosophy proper. Thus, in the classic literature from Homer to the great literary figures, we do not find a clear demarcation between humans and the natural world. We should remember that in the mythic world “the term ‘law’ normally applies to ritual, to morality and to the natural order at the same time” (Kahn 1974, p. 115). Indeed “in front of man stand not nature, but the power of the gods, and they intervene as easily in the natural world as in the life of men” (Kahn 1974, p. 115). Later on, when the division between the natural and non-natural world was discovered, it becomes clear that “it is not the assimilation of nature and society which

philosophy was called upon to establish, but rather their speculation from one another" (Kahn 1974, p. 116).

Finally, we find two important philosophic achievements by Anaximander. First, he shares with other philosophers in the discovery of a "kosmos". The concept of kosmos lies at the heart of ancient Greek perception of the natural world. The term "kosmos" means in Greek a beautifully arranged or properly structured universe. Second, Anaximander above and beyond the other thinkers replaced the personality of mythic governors with well-defined 'administration' of cosmic powers.

Anaximenes

The best place to start Anaximenes's theory is with Simplicius; Let us consider the following text:

"Anaximenes of Miletus, son of Eurystratus, the companion of Anaximander, also posits a single infinite underlying substance of things, not, however, indefinite in character like Anaximander's but determinate, for he calls it air, and says that it differs in rarity and density according to the different substances. Rarefied, it becomes fire; condensed, it becomes first wind, then cloud, and when condensed still further water, then earth and stones. Everything else is made of these. He too postulated eternal motion, which is indeed the cause of the change." (Kahn 1974, p. 145).

The above point is adumbrated in Aristotle as well. In his 'physics', he claimed that the 'nature philosophers' are divided into two camps. Without mentioning his name, he placed Anaximenes in the first group that postulated the underlying principle to be as one namely water, fire, air, or 'something in between.

In this regard, Anaximenes's teaching is correctly grouped in the monistic school of his fellow Milesians. In accordance with tradition, all things originate from one principle and are "resolved into the same". He shared Anaximander's notion of a non-limited 'stuff' and gave it a determinate quality which he identified with 'Air'. Anaximenes had also written a book of which we only have one remaining (extant) fragment. He was less poetic in his deliberation and "more prosaic and scientific in his approach" (Ring 2000, p. 29).

The doctrine of Anaximenes is usually presented by comparison with Anaximander's. As we recall, "the 'Apeiron' is the un-perceived entity which is supposed to explain perceived natural phenomenon" (Ring 2000, p. 29). To be sure, the move to explain phenomena by the non-perceived entity is one of the chief characteristics of science. Anaximenes departs from his predecessor on two important points. First, he rejected the idea of a transcendent entity that is supposed to explain visible objects. Second, he found him (Anaximander) wanting in explaining how existing things transform one into the other.

Air: (Positive Teachings)

Anaximenes rejected the 'Apeiron' of Anaximander and came up with a different Arche namely 'Air'. Thus, for Anaximenes 'Air' is considered to be the

basic stuff from which all things have their origins into which they would be reabsorbed again. Anaximenes addressed the problem of change more successfully than his predecessors. Hence, the problem of change and the process of things is central to his system of thought. The specific question he tried to tackle is: “But if matter did not always remain in its primary state, was it possible to offer any material explanation for why? In other words, why explain, the varying manifestation of its appearance?” (Kahn 1974, p. 119).

The challenge is to come up with a natural cause to explain the transformation of one state of matter into another. Anaximenes found ‘air’ to be suitable to overcome this quandary since it is capable of explaining the transformation of ‘one form or matter into another’.

Why Air

The chief motive of Anaximenes in his selection, or Air wrests in his strive to explain all physical phenomena with natural phenomena. This takes place through the process of condensation and rarefaction. Notice that “Air can be transformed into the other stuff by process or “thinning and thickening.” (Ring 2000, p. 3). Air is also inherently in perpetual motion which enables the transformation of elements to take place. For instance, water when cooled would change into ice through the process of condensation and again through rarefaction into rocks etc.

Finally, since air is self-propelling, it is considered alive. For the ancient Greeks, air and life are identical. Life without air is impossible: “That the air which we breathe should be the life which animates us is a common idea, and the breath soul a world-wide conception” (Kahn 1974, p. 119). The belief in the identity of air with soul was not formulated by a single philosopher or school but was part of the ancient cultural belief.

With Anaximenes’s the concept of air took a significant change in terms of its meaning and representation. In the old tradition, ‘Air’ “signified mist fog, or darkness”. In contrast to this perspective, Anaximenes came up with a new idea. In his work “Air” assumed the invisible ‘element that we take to be air.’ When he claims that ‘air’ through modification and rarefaction he is referring to the later meaning of air, not the old motion that we mentioned above.

(III)

Summing up

Most agree that ancient Greek philosophy moved from mythical disclosure to what is considered to be a form of rational speculation about the world. When it comes to the meaning and implication of the shift, we find different versions of interpretations. The old and at one time widespread version claims that the ancient Greek thinkers “offered “new” answers to the “eternal” questions of mankind.

This representative account of ‘Ancient philosophy’ is not taken seriously anymore. There are two currently popular and opposing views pertaining to the

transformation of mythic culture to the world of rational speculation: (A) Ancient Greek philosophy is the "precursor" of modern science. John Burnet and Carl Popper are typical representatives of this school. B) On the other hand, the opposite view claims that there is no radical break between the religious (mythic) and philosophic perception of the world that is represented among others by Bruno Snell and Michael B. Foster.

The Case for Discontinuity

As mentioned above, John Burnet and Karl Popper advanced the claim that ancient Greek philosophy made a break with the old mythical tradition. John Burnet, in his classic Book "Early Greek Philosophy," writes: "we have seen that there had been a complete break with the early Aegean religion and that the Olympian polytheism never had a firm hold on the Ionian mind" (Burnet 1930, p. 13).

He believes that Ionian philosophy is 'secular' through and through. Thus, he contends that there is a break and discontinuity between the old and the new tradition. "Iona" he said "was a country without a past. That explains the secular character of the earliest Ionian philosophy" (Burnet 1930, p. 14).

Karl Popper

In his important article "Back to the pre-Socratics" Karl Popper argues that two factors stand out as decisive turning points in establishing the distinctive feature of the Pre-Socratic philosophy: (1) One is the "simplicity" and "boldness" of their question" and (2) the other is the critical spirit they developed over the years against the old tradition.

They raised broad and foundational questions which are quite different from the "puzzle-solving" activities of the specialist. Their engagement with cosmological questions was deeply connected with epistemological issues. This endeavor alone will entitle them to receive the honorific title of being a 'scientist'.

The Case of Continuity: Michael Foster

Even though it is true that science originated in ancient Greece, the new attitude (philosophy) was not completely free from the religious or mythical view of the world. Taking his cue from Werner Jaeger, (*Paideia: The Ideals of Culture*). Michael B. Foster (*Mystery and Philosophy*) advanced two important claims in favor of continuity between the two traditions. In elaborating his claim, Foster takes also B. Snell's insightful statement as a point of departure: "Greek, thought did not cease to be religious when it becomes philosophical" (Foster 1957, p. 32).

One of the most crucial objections of Greek religious aspiration was to transform human knowledge into divine knowledge. The philosophic activity was also motivated by the desire to transform human ignorance into human wisdom. Hence, both the old and new traditions carry a similar mission of elevating humanity into some sort of divinity. This claim is connected with the origin philosophy.

There is a strong tradition in ancient Greek that ‘wonder’ is the source of philosophy. Both Plato and Aristotle have alluded to the phenomenon of ‘wonder’ as an important ingredient of philosophizing. The notion of wonder implies difficulties and perplexities that we encounter in our effort to comprehend “reality”. On the positive side, wonder awakens in us our ignorance and hence encourages us for further probing. Greek philosophy “never stopped wondering”. And thus, they defined philosophy as ‘love of wisdom’.

Finally, we are reminded that the fundamental motivation behind Greek philosophy is not “scientific but theological”. Consider Yager’s memorable statement” “though philosophy means death to the old gods, it is itself religion.” (Foster 1957, p. 32). Thus, the motivation behind the new thinkers is not scientific but rather religious.

Continuity in Discontinuity

At this stage, we can see clearly the two contending schools of interpretation clearly come to the fore. The first claim is that even though philosophy with its emphasis on logical rigor, conceptual analysis, methodic inquiry, etc., looks different from myth, we can postulate with certainty that there is continuity between the two traditions.

The second school claims that with the rise of the new generation of thinkers, “the maze of myth is dissipated with extraordinary suddenness from the origin of the world of life” (Guthrie 1962, p. 141), and hence the break is complete.

Given the two antithetical views presented above, I submit that the best possible position would be to recognize both the existence of continuity and discontinuity between the old and the new traditions and acknowledged that philosophy originated in the struggle against and along with mythic culture at the same time.

I would like to sum up my “genealogy” by advancing the following propositions. I believe that as far as the relation between philosophy and mythology goes, the ‘dialectic of continuity in discontinuity’ is in operation.

1. With the rise of the new thinkers, old terms acquired new meanings. This is so because when thought changes, language also changes as well. Here, a good example would be the term ‘Arche’. For the old school, Arche means beginning whereas later the meaning changed to ‘origin’ or ‘principle’.
2. Even though the new thinkers were called nature philosophers (Aristotle) their theory did not emanate from observation. In fact, they were more like ‘inspired oracle’. Here, we can summon the authority of F.M. Cornford who advances the claim that philosophy began as an “extension” and “differentiations” from the prophet-poet-sage complex. This means philosophy takes the same material from myth and gives it a conceptual feature.
3. The movement from myth to the study of nature has become a precondition to science; this does not mean however that early philosophy is motivated by scientific attitude.

4. We should not that the difference between the mythic and philosophic approach is not clearly demarcated. Entrenched mythical presentations were not overrun all at once. It took the cooperation and effort of a generation of thinkers to finally dislodge mythology.

In fact, the entrenched mythical attitude lived side by side with the new spirit for a long time. It took the collective effort of a generation of thinkers to finally dislodge mythology. In doing so, the new thinkers have indeed altered the old views of nature and the divine.

References

- Adam J (1965) *The religious teachers of Greece: being Gifford lectures on natural religion developed at Aberdeen*. New Jersey: Reference Book, Inc., Publishers.
- Burnet J (1930) *Early Greek philosophy*. 4th Edition. London: Adam & Charles black.
- Foster B (1957) *Mystery and philosophy*. London: SLM Press LTD.
- Gadamer H (1985) Religion and religiosity in Socrates. In JJ Cleary (ed.), *The Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* (Volume I, 53–77). University Press of America.
- Gadamer H (1998) *The beginning of philosophy*. Translated by R Coltman. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Guthrie W (1962) *A history of Greek philosophy*. Volume I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kahn C (1974) Anaximander's fragments: the universe governed by law. In PD Mourelatos (ed.), *The Pre-Socratics: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 99–118. New York: Anchor Press.
- Kahn C (1983) *The art and thought of Heraclitus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirk G, Raven J, Schofield M (1983) *The pre-Socratic philosopher*. Cambridge University Press.
- Luce J (1992) *An introduction to Greek philosophy*. London: Thomas and Hudson Ltd.
- Nahm M (1964) *Selections from early Greek philosophy*. New York: Meredith Publishing Company.
- Plato (2003) *The Republic*. Edited by GRF Ferrari. Translated by T Griffith. The University of Cambridge.
- Ring M (2000) *Beginning with the pre-Socratics*. 2nd Edition. California State University: Mayfield Pub Company.
- Snell B (1982) *The discovery of mind, in Greek philosophy and literature*. New York: Dover Pub, Inc.
- Strauss L (1965) *Natural right and history*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Verdenius W (1972) *Mimesis Plato's doctrine of artistic imitation and its meaning to us*. The Netherlands.
- Wheelwright P. (1959) *Heraclitus*. Princeton University Press.