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HPPH7010
KNOWLEDGE, REASON AND REALITY, ASS. 1
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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This chapter discusses the work of four philosophers and its significance: Thales (620 – 546 B.C.E.), Anaximander (610 – 546 B.C.E.), Anaximenes (585 – 524 B.C.E.) and Xenophanes (570 – 480 B.C.E.). Thales is important because he is considered the first philosopher in the western tradition. Anaximander and Anaximenes were his immediate successors. All three of these were natives of Miletus in Ionia. Xenophanes was a native of Colophon also in Ionia.

The chapter has little to say about Thales but does point out that he is significant as the first philosopher we know of to discuss the workings of the natural world in natural terms rather than mythologically. Most of what we know about these four comes from reports of later authors. Early in the chapter Aristotle is quoted, from which we learn something about Thales: "Others say that the earth rests on water. For this is the most ancient account we have received, which they say was given by Thales the Milesian, that it stays put through floating like a log or some such thing." (p. 48) Schofield uses this quote to segue into a discussion about the stability of the earth, dealt with by all three of the philosophers from Miletus having little more to say in this section about Thales except that "the use of instruments in determining the behavior of heavenly bodies constitutes in fact Thales' best-documented claim to a place in the history of rational enquiry about the natural world." (p. 47) In doing so I feel Schofield leaves one with a distorted sense of the possible contributions Thales made relative to his successors.

After quoting Aristotle, Schofield goes on to say, "To come to terms with this unappealing version of flat-earthism we need to consider two pieces of information relating to Thales' intellectual grandchild Anaximenes, pupil of Anaximander...." (p. 48) Other than the gratuitous put down, I cite the following in support of my opinion that Schofield does Thales an injustice. According to Patricia O'Grady¹ "There is testimony that Thales knew the earth to be spherical, but no evidence to suggest that he proposed any other shape." She also says "Aristotle may have attributed knowledge of the sphericity of the earth to Thales, an opinion which was later reported by Aëtius (Aët. III. 9 -10) and followed by Ps.-Plutarch (*Epit.* III.10). Aristotle wrote that some think it spherical, others flat and shaped like a drum (Arist. *Cael.* 293 b33-294 a1), and then attributed belief in a flat earth to Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, and Democritus (Arist. *Cael.* 294 b14-15). If following chronological order, Aristotle's words, 'some think it spherical', referred to the theory of Thales."

The rest of Schofield's discussion concerning these philosophers' theories related to the stability of the earth is especially interesting. For example, he cites Aristotle as saying, "There are some who say like Anaximander among the ancients, that it [the earth] stays put due to likeness. For it is appropriate for that which is established in the middle and is related all alike to the extremities not to move up rather than down or sideways; but it is impossible for it to make a motion in opposite directions; so, of necessity it stays put." (p. 51) As Schofield points

¹ Patricia, O'Grady, "Thales of Miletus", "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy" (Oct. 17, 2020) James Fieser (ed.), url = iep.utm.edu/thales/, Oct 17, 2020

out, this is possibly the first instance of an appeal to a principle of sufficient reason and from symmetry. As with most things concerning the Ionians there is controversy about how to interpret this statement by Aristotle and Schofield covers aspects of the controversy. At least according to Schofield there is no controversy about Anaximenes holding that the earth is flat and that Anaximander held that it was drum shaped.

In the section devoted to Anaximander (pp. 55 – 64), we can learn considerably more about this philosopher than we could about Thales in his section. We learn that he disagreed with Thales about water being the origin of all things. His originating principle he called the apeiron. From this Anaximander has Hot and Cold separating out. He writes of the origin of the earth, the sun and the moon and of the first animals emerging from water, even hinting at a cause of this, the evaporation of water. As Schofield points out, Anaximander viewed the world as an intelligible system that could be known by human intelligence and that allows for the reconstruction of past events. (p. 57) From Schofield's account, one can surmise that the kinds of explanations that Anaximander gives for various aspects of nature are based on observations that are immediately observable to human senses such as the evaporation of water, and holes in something to explain the fact of eclipses. Thus, we are looking at the beginnings of a kind of empiricism.

We learn that Anaximander believed the apeiron to be immortal and indestructible, steering all things and in continual motion which is what caused the original separation of hot and cold. In one of the most interesting fragments of Anaximander's writings found in Schofield's chapter, "And out of those things from which the generation is for existing things, into these again their destruction comes about "according to what is right and due, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice, according to the ordinance of time" (p. 62), we see Anaximander also using more abstract and intangible forces in explanatory roles. Although the facts of what Anaximander calls 'generation' and 'destruction' may still very well have come from easily observable events such as the freezing and melting of water, the birth, death and decomposition of the body, or the cycle of the seasons adding that this is "according to what is right and due, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice" seems to be ascribing underlying and intelligible forces at work in nature. This could be an example of how Anaximander saw the Apeiron to be steering all things, not in a whimsical way but in a rational way indicated by his use of "according to what is right and due."

It is unclear to what extent Anaximenes is directly responding to Anaximander but, according to Schofield, it is certainly to some extent. One of things he adds to Anaximander is to claim that the apeiron is air. He has an interesting idea of how different things arise out of air by compression and expansion. From Aetius we learn that Anaximenes seems to believe that the air controls the universe as breath controls our soul.

Passing on from Anaximenes, Schofield characterizes Xenophanes' work as philosophy turning reflective. He is the first philosopher we know of to express explicit concerns over the possibility of knowledge. He too is interested in explanations of the natural world in natural terms, but he has wider interests than appear in the earlier philosophers. He is critical of

anthropomorphic conceptions of the gods and their behavior. He said that horses and cattle and lions, if they could, would have gods that looked like them. He also says about religion, that one god is greatest and is in no way like humans and that this god is unmoving and affects all things by his thoughts. There are those who believe on this basis that Xenophanes was the first monotheist. Xenophanes also said that we can't know the truth about the gods or even what he had to say himself. He said that everything is just opinion and apparently expressed the rather modern point of view that the gods had not revealed things to humans but that by seeking they would be able to improve their knowledge with time. Schofield believes that Xenophanes' work partially explains why there was a transition from the cosmological concerns of the Milesians to metaphysics and epistemology.

In this chapter we learn that there are lots of controversies about how to interpret the fragments we have of these philosophers' works, but we don't learn much about what these other commentators think. Schofield, in my opinion, is rather free in criticizing the interpretations of others as being on flimsy grounds but seems quite ready to draw his own conclusions. Many of the known fragments are quoted, however, which is helpful in forming one's own opinions. One learns the sources of these fragments and at the end of the chapter there is a very useful bibliography. This chapter is an excellent introduction to these early western philosophers from which one can get a good idea of their significance and of the issues they raised and attempted to answer, issues which continue to be of interest to current philosophers.

Perhaps say 'for example...'

René Descartes, 'The Meditations Concerning First Philosophy' in Descartes: Discourse on Method and Meditations, (Indianapolis, New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1960)

Descartes is famous for his system of methodical doubt, for proclaiming that, "I am, I exist," is necessarily true, and for what has come to be called Cartesian Dualism, the proposal that the mind and body are two entirely different entities. The last of these is so pervasive in Western culture that no one interested in culture and philosophy can ignore Descartes. All of these are developed in the six meditations which make up 'The Meditations Concerning First Philosophy' which can also be seen as a project to refute skepticism, provide a foundation for scientific investigation and lay out a method for achieving certain knowledge.

Descartes' project begins with systematic doubt. Descartes defines knowledge in terms of doubt. For him "knowledge is conviction based on a reason so strong that it can never be shaken by any stronger reason. (24 May 1640 letter to Regius, AT 3:65, CSMK147)"² As it turns out there will be two benefits to doubting. First, he will extirpate any false ideas he already holds and second, he will arrive at a proposition that he believes cannot be doubted, thus a piece of knowledge which will provide a foundation for rebuilding his knowledge on a firm basis.

² Newman, Lex, "Descartes' Epistemology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/descartes-epistemology/>.

Descartes gives three reasons for doubt. First, he says that all of his prior beliefs "have been acquired from the senses or by means of the senses" and these are unreliable. (p. 76). But, he asks, aren't there times when the senses give us reliable information? In answer he gives his second reason for doubt, vivid dreams. He then questions if there aren't still things that we can know. "For whether I am awake or whether I am asleep, two and three will always make the number five...." (p. 78) It is at this point that Descartes introduces his third reason for doubt, the possibility of an all-powerful God or demon who is intent on deceiving him. Perhaps this God or demon has brought it about that he is always mistaken. Descartes concludes, "I am at last constrained to admit that there is nothing in what I formerly believed to be true which I cannot somehow doubt...." (p. 79) ✓

It is tempting to dismiss Cartesian doubt, but one should realize, he isn't trying to disprove anything, in fact says of his opinions, "they are what they really are - that is, somewhat doubtful, as I have just shown, even if highly probable - so that there is much more reason to believe than to deny them." (P. 79) His point being, they can be doubted and therefore aren't knowledge and his project is to achieve knowledge.

Having arrived at this point of total doubt, Descartes next step is to see if nevertheless, he can find something indubitable. Something occurs to him. He realizes that no matter how powerful any deceiver may be, "there can be no doubt that I exist since he deceives me.... I am, I exist, is necessarily true every time that I pronounce it in my mind." (P. 86)

But what is he? On the basis of all the reasons previously given for doubting, he cannot assume that he is any kind of body of the sort that can be sensed and he realizes that the only attribute that he knows is inseparable from his nature is thinking. He is a thinking being.

At this point, he can't be sure that anything else exists. He is trapped in solipsism. To escape he will prove the existence of God. To make this argument he will need some tools. The most important is his "principle that everything which we conceive very clearly and very distinctly is wholly true." He makes the following argument for this: (1) the knowledge that he exists as a thinking being is based on a clear and distinct perception. (2) that this basis would not be sufficient assurance if it were possible that something else which he conceived just as clearly and distinctly should prove false and that (3) therefore, since this earlier conclusion is indubitable, he can conclude the "general principle that everything which he "conceives very clearly and very distinctly is wholly true." (P. 92) ✓

✓ I think at this point is worth revisiting the reasons Descartes gives for not doubting that he exists. The reason he gives is that even if he is being deceived, it is he who is being deceived, thus, he can't be nothing as long as he is being deceived. I think there is an underlying principle here that is being obscured, the principle of non-contradiction. It is because of this principle that Descartes cannot doubt that he exists. 'I am being deceived' and 'I do not exist' are contradictory. As he will say later, he can't doubt "a manifest contradiction." (p. 93) Even at this point where he lists a number of things that he can't doubt because of contradiction, it is unclear if he includes "I am, I exist" as being in the list and stated in isolation like this it's easy to

see why no contradiction is evident. My point here is that Descartes' entire argument is undermined by the fact that he didn't doubt enough, that he didn't doubt logic or question the operations of human reason in general and thus is unwarranted, for this reason, in concluding "I am, I exist" and thus also in concluding his general principle regarding the clear and distinct.

However, to continue with Descartes argument the purpose of which is now to rebuild knowledge, he points out that some of what he was able to doubt was solely based on the all-powerful and deceiving God or demon that he imagined. In order to remove this reason for doubt what Descartes will argue is that God exists, that God is perfectly good and that as a result he is the guarantor that any proposition that the human mind comes to hold very clearly and very distinctly is actually knowledge.

Since there are some terms in this argument that can be confusing it seems wise to consider them before outlining Descartes' argument. Descartes distinguishes three levels of reality, formal, objective and eminent. "The formal reality of a thing is the kind of reality the thing possesses in virtue of its being an actual or an existent thing (AT VII 41–42, 102–4; CSM II 28–29, 74–5)."³ Within formal reality there are: "the level of infinite substance, the level of finite substance (as defined by its principal attribute), and the level of mode. The objective reality of a thing is the kind of reality a thing possesses in virtue of its being a representation of something within the mind. As with formal reality, there are three 'levels' of objective reality."⁴ Descartes says, "Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective reality than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents" (AT VII 40; CSM II 28).⁵ It is important not to confuse Descartes' objective reality for what is meant by objective today. As for eminent reality, I don't think his meaning is clear. But as I understand it, it involves aspects of an entity that are more potentials than manifest realities and perhaps properties of God that we are unable to fully understand.

Descartes' argument for God goes as follows:

(1) "It is obvious, according to the light of nature, that there must be at least as much reality in the total efficient cause as in the effect.... And from this it follows not only that something cannot be derived from nothing, but also that the more perfect - that is to say, that which contains within itself more reality - cannot be a consequence of and dependent upon the less perfect." (p. 97)

(2) "In order that an idea should contain one objective reality rather than another, it should no doubt obtain it from some cause in which there is at least as much formal reality as the idea contains objective reality." (p. 98)

³ Smith, Kurt, "Descartes' Theory of Ideas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL =

<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/descartes-ideas/>>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

(3) "Thus, the light of Nature makes me clearly recognize that ideas in me are like paintings or pictures which can, truly, easily fall short of the perfection of the original from which they have been drawn, but which can never contain anything greater or more perfect." (p.98)

(4) "Clearly ... if the objective reality or perfection of some one of my ideas is such that I recognize clearly that this same reality or perfection does not exist in me, either formally or eminently, and consequently that I cannot myself be its cause, it necessarily follows that I am not alone in the world, but that there is also some other entity that exists and is the cause of this idea." (p. 99)

(5) "By the word 'God', I mean an infinite substance, eternal, immutable, independent, omniscient, omnipotent, and that by which I myself and all other existent things, have been created and produced. But these attributes are such - they are so great and so eminent - that the more attentively I consider them, the less I can persuade myself that I could have derived them from my own nature. And consequently, we must necessarily conclude from all that I have previously said that God exists." (p. 101)

Is existence
a property
though
Expand
here on
later.

Descartes, after redescribing God perfection, and the absence of any defects, ends the *Third Meditation* by saying, "from this it is quite evident that he cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that deception must always be the result of some deficiency." (p. 108)

And in the *Fourth Meditation* Descartes adds to this, saying, "I have some ability to judge or distinguish the true from the false.... Furthermore, ... it is also certain that he has not given me an ability of such a sort that I could ever go wrong when I use it properly." (p. 109)

Worried that this argument will be interpreted to mean that he could never be in error, Descartes gives some counter arguments. I found two of these arguments to be particularly interesting. In the first of these he acknowledges that he is capable of errors, but suggests that his possible imperfection as an individual may not actually be an imperfection, he points out that an individual part (himself) of some whole (the creation) may look imperfect when considered by itself but may nevertheless be perfect in so far as it is a functional part of the whole.

The second argument introduces the concept of free will. Descartes' argument is that while he can always distinguish the true from the false in areas in which he has the ability to discover the clear and distinct, there are areas which his abilities are incapable of understanding. However, because he has total, perfect, unrestricted free will he is liable out of his free will to make judgements about things beyond his ability to reach the necessary clarity. As Descartes puts it, "Whence, then do my errors, arise? Only from the fact that the will is much more ample and far-reaching than the understanding, so that I do not restrain it within the same limits but extend it even to those things which I do not understand." (P. 114) However, he concludes, "I can nevertheless, by attentive and frequently repeated meditation, so strongly impress it upon

my memory that I will never fail to recollect it whenever there is need, and thus I can acquire the habit of not erring. And since this comprises the greatest and principal perfection of man, I consider that I have benefited not a little by today's meditation, in having discovered the cause of error and falsity." (p. 117)

Descartes still needs to prove the existence of external entities and it is in part of this argument that he also completes his theory of the separation of mind and body. His argument goes like this:

- 1) All things that he thinks clearly and distinctly can be produced by God.
- 2) If he can clearly and distinctly conceive of two things as being separate then they are separate.
- 3) He knows that he exists.
- 4) He knows that nothing else necessarily belongs to his essence except that he is a thinking being.
- 5) Therefore, he is solely a thinking substance.
- 6) I have a body as will shortly be proved.
- 7) I have a distinct idea of a body as a being which does not think.
- 8) Therefore, it is certain that he is entirely distinct from his body and can exist without it.

At this point in the argument Descartes has finally arrived at his famous dualistic theory of mind and body as separate substances with different properties.

The argument continues.

- 9) He has various faculties such as imagination and perception.
- 10) He can conceive of himself without them.
- 11) He can't conceive of them without them being attached to a thinking substance.
- 12) These faculties are distinct from me as are shapes, and other accidental characteristics of objects from the objects that sustain them.
- 13) He has other faculties such as the ability to change position which can't exist unless they inhere in some substance.
- 14) These faculties (if they exist) must inhere in some corporeal or extended substance since their clear and distinct concept includes the idea of extension but no idea of intelligence.
- 15) He has a passive faculty of receiving these ideas of sensible objects.
- 16) There is either in him or in something else, an active faculty that produces these ideas.
- 17) This active faculty can't be in him as a thinking being and since the ideas often occur against his will.
- 18) Thus, it must exist in some substance other than himself in which all the reality that exists objectively in the ideas produced is formally and eminently contained.
- 19) That substance is either a corporeal body or it is God.
- 20) He has no faculty for determining the source.
- 21) He does have a very strong inclination to believe that the source is corporeal objects

*22) Therefore, since God is not a deceiver, corporeal objects exist.⁶

Having proved the existence of material objects, Descartes notes that there are still many beliefs he holds that are doubtful and uncertain. As he ends the *Meditations*, I believe he is laying the groundwork for how it is possible to make scientific progress, a goal he expressed at the very beginning of the *First Meditation*. This possibility follows from the fact that God is not a deceiver and has provided him with a faculty that when used properly is capable of correcting any errors. He runs through a litany of things that he has truly learned from nature and others that he hasn't truly learned because they have only entered his mind due to his being inattentive. Some examples are: that spaces in which there is nothing that makes an impression on him are empty, that in a colored object there is the same color, that tastes are in the foods he eats and that stars and other distant objects are the size they appear to be. I see Descartes as making a distinction between what we would call a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge. He says here that he is not considering knowledge of truths such as his knowledge that what has been done in the past could later be found not to have been done and similar truths that he learns through the "light of nature." Nature, in this section, is his nature as a "being composed of mind and body." This nature (different from the light of nature) teaches him things such as the fact that he should avoid things that cause pain and seek things that cause pleasure and other similar things but nothing much else, he says, should be concluded from sense perceptions concerning the outside world. "For it seems to me that it is the business of the mind alone, and not of the being composed of mind and body to decide the truth of such matters." (p. 136)

leave room/space to
draw together your
criticisms in the conclusion.

⁶ Each step in this argument is a paraphrase excerpted from pages 131 – 134.