PHI 201: HISTORY OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY
PRESENTATION EXAMPLE 1: THALES, ANAXIMANDER, & ANAXIMENES
Dr. Dave Yount

A. THALES:

1. **BIO/BEARINGS**: (3-5 minutes) Briefly state the name of the philosopher and the assigned article that you are presenting. Give the class a *brief* (at least 3 but no more than 5 minutes) overview of the philosopher's life -- e.g., birth and death dates, the work the article is taken from, other famous works, where he/she lived, places lived, whether he/she got married and/or had kids, etc. You should find a picture of the philosopher, print it out, and pass that around the class; if you are the first of more than one student to present the same philosopher (or the second, and some other student is still going to present that philosopher again), then only have one picture, so you will allow others to find other pictures to show the class. If you are the second person to present on the same person, try to find other biographical information we have not heard yet, and other pictures we have not seen. However, if you are going to present either the *last* time we will cover a philosopher or you will be the *only* person to present that philosopher, then you may print out more than one picture of the philosopher. Lastly, do NOT give lengthy descriptions of the philosophers' works, which you will find in their biographies sometimes.

Thales, pp. 8-10.

Thales' life: Lived from c. 624 – c. 546. Typically said to be the first Greek philosopher (at least in writing), but some scholars contest that Anaximander is really the first. Thales was born in Miletus in Asia Minor (now Turkey). There are varying opinions about whom was in his family tree (going back to Phoenician Cadmus, or not), about whether he married, about whether he had a legitimate son Cybisthus or Cybisthon, but it is said that he adopted his nephew Cybisthus in any case. It is said that he wrote "On the Solstice" and "On the Equinox", neither of which exist now. Thales is claimed by Aristotle (see Fragment 2) to have been taunted about how philosophy doesn't make any money, so in response he bought up all the olive presses when they were out of season, selling them back for a huge profit! He was also an astronomer, predicting a solar eclipse, after which the Lydians and Medes immediately made peace, seeing it as an omen. Thales was also a politician, advising the Milesians not to engage the Lydians, and for the Ionians to create their own Ionian state.

2. **OVERVIEW:** (8-10 minutes) Briefly describe what the author's main thesis or point is, in the assigned material. Try to answer these questions briefly: What is the argument? What is the issue? Why is this issue important? How does the author support his or her position? Does the author make any assumptions in order to make his or her argument (if so, mention them)? Is the author making any objections against his or her opponents' position(s) (if so, mention them)? Warnings: (1) Do NOT just get on the Web and print something off about the philosopher's theory in general and/or tell us about every aspect of his or her view -- only present the article in the text, as it occurs there. EX: We are reading Plato's theory of knowledge: do not discuss his view of the ideal state that you found on the Web. That is plagiarism to just read what someone else has said about your philosopher. (2) Make SURE that you cover every section of the reading if there are sections, or say something about what is stated on every page, at least briefly. (3) Read your article as soon as possible once your article is assigned to you, so you can see if it's difficult for you to understand. Dr. Y can help you with it, as long as you read it before the morning of your presentation. You cannot just come to class for your presentation and state that your article was confusing so you didn't get much out of it, and expect to do well.

[What are the main points of Thales?]

[1] BIO: Thales apparently was mocked for being focused on the sky, gazing upwards because he wanted to know more about the stars, and consequently falling into a well. [Apparently he really liked astronomy.]

[2] BIO: Practicality of Philosophy I: He was also mocked for his poverty, with the point that philosophy isn't of much use. In response, he took out a loan and bought up all the olive presses in Miletus and Chios while they were not in demand so they were cheap, and then sold them for a large profit. He [this could just be Aristotle's inference!] made the point that philosophers could be rich if that is what they wanted, but that they focused on other things.

[3] BIO: Practicality of Philosophy II: Thales apparently aided king Croesus; the troops were stopped at the Halys river, and needed to cross, but they had no bridges there at the time. So Thales diverted the river and split it by creating a diversion upstream. This lowered the water level and allowed the troops to cross the Halys river.
[4] His big claim: The main building block of the universe is water, and the earth rests on water. For the nutriment of all things is moist; heat itself is generated from the moist and kept alive by it; seeds have a moist nature; water is the origin of the nature of moist things.
[5] Water [moist natural substance] is easily formed into each different thing and undergoes various changes. Part of it is exhaled and made into air; the finest part is kindled from air into aether; when water is compacted and changes into slime it becomes earth. Of the four elements, water is the most active as a cause.
[6] The earth is on water, riding it as a ship does, and when it "quakes", it is merely rocking because of the water's movement.
[7] The soul is something kinetic; since the Magnesian stone moves iron, it possesses a soul.
[8] All things are full of gods [since others say that soul is intermingled in the universe].

[What is at issue?]
First, whether or not astronomy [1] and/or philosophy [2-3] are valuable; second, the constituent[s] of the universe; third, whether there is a soul [and if soul is related to motion]; and fourth, whether God or gods exist.

[What assumptions is Thales making?]
Thales assumes that only one substance can be the building block of the universe.

3. **CLARIFICATION**: (5-15 minutes, depending on your and the other students' questions) Is there anything about this material that you did not understand (after looking up unclear or unknown words, etc.)? What are you confused about? What did not make sense in the reading? What questions would you ask if you could talk to this philosopher right here and now? [NOTES: (1) This is where I want everyone to be really honest and tell me if they were confused about ANYTHING! You will not have points taken off from your presentation for asking questions -- answering questions will only increase everyone's understanding of the material, including yours. (2) This is the point in the class where I will answer your questions from everyone else's article summaries.]

No questions: I'll do my best to answer yours.

4. **PRAISE/CRITICISM/ANALYSIS**: (2-5 minutes -- not a one sentence summary of what you thought) What do you think about the author's argument or point? Do you agree and why or why not? Do you have any objection(s) to the author's argument? If so, how do you suppose the author would respond to it (or them)? Do you have a better idea, and if so, what is it? How does this author's position or argument compare with other authors' positions or arguments already presented? [NOTES: Please do not tell us how confusing the article was or how many times you had to read it, or whether you liked the style of the article. First, as far as confusion goes, I will do everything I can in class to help you make sense of the article, even if you did not understand it when you presented it. As far as writing style goes, these kinds of points are what would be discussed in an English class, and this class is a philosophy class.]

PRAISE/ANALYSIS:

- [2]-[3]: It's fun (at least to me) to see philosophy defended as something useful. We may not see a lot of this kind of point made in the rest of the semester! And one can see his concentration on astronomy [1] as a good thing, given his ability to predict eclipses.
- [4]-[6]: One can sympathize with his claim that water is at least a valuable component to, if not the basic building block of, life; for instance, sperm and eggs are fluid-like and the uterus requires moisture to allow for gestation; plants/seeds require moisture as well. And note that Fragment 5 says that water is the *most active* cause, not that it is the *only* cause.
- [7]: One might snicker that because a loadstone attracts something to it, that it must have a soul. But one must account for the fact that some things can move themselves and some

cannot. If one accepts that all matter is made up of the same stuff [whatever it is – water, subatomic particles, or whatever], then how can plants, animals, and humans move themselves with the same basic building blocks?
- [8]: If souls are gods, and souls are everywhere, then the universe is full of gods. Of course, we'd have to know if this is true to evaluate it.
- Dr. Y's hypothetical dissertation joke: Thales went to his thesis advisor and said that he wanted to propose that some things were water. Thesis Advisor: Not controversial enough. Thales: How about most things are water? Thesis Advisor: Still not controversial enough. Thales: OK, all things are water. Thesis Advisor: I approve.

CRITICISM:

- It seems pretty certain that physically everything is not made of water.
- The existence of the soul and/or gods has not been proven.

B. ANAXIMANDER:

1. **BEARINGS**:

Anaximander, pp. 10-12.

Anaximander's life: (c. 610 BC–c. 546 BC); he lived in Miletus as well and was a pupil of Thales; he was the teacher of Anaximenes (and apparently Pythagoras, though that is not mentioned on Pythagoras' entry in Wikipedia). As is typical of many of the earlier philosophers, little of his life and work is known today. With his assertion that physical forces, rather than supernatural means, create order in the universe, Anaximander can be considered the first true scientist. He is known to have conducted the earliest recorded scientific experiment. Anaximander was also put in some sort of leadership position in Apollonia, a colony of Milesia. He created a map of the world near him that advanced the geography of his day.

2. **OVERVIEW**:

[What are the main points of Anaximander?]

[1] MORE BIO: Anaximander discovered the equinox, solstices, hour-indicators (?), and that the earth is the center of the universe [You might think he's wrong, but I've heard an astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson on a podcast claim that every point in the universe is the center of the universe]. He invented the gnomon to measure the location/direction of the sun. He advanced geometry. He wrote *On Nature*, *Circuit of the Earth* and *On the Fixed Stars and a Celestial Globe*, and some other works.

[2] MORE BIO: Anaximander is the first Greek known to have given a written account on nature.

[3] FIRST PRINCIPLE(S): The universe is one, moving, and infinite. The first principle and element of existing things is the *apeiron* [=indefinite or infinite or unlimited], which is a material principle. Thus, neither water, air, fire, nor earth is the source of everything else (all the heavens and the worlds in them); the *apeiron* is; for the four elements change into one another and so no one of them can be the ultimate material principle.

[4] CREATION OF SUN, MOON, STARS: That which is productive from the eternal of hot and cold was separated when the world came to be; a sphere of flame then surrounded the air around the earth; then this was shut off in certain circles, which created the sun, moon, and stars.

[5] EARTH'S SHAPE: The earth is cylindrical in shape; its depth is 1/3 its width. [EX: 3000 miles diameter, 1000 miles in height.]

[6] EARTH: We live on one of the flat sides of the earth, but there is another side.
[7] SUN: The sun is 28 times the size of the earth.
[8] FIRST LIVING CREATURES: They were born in moisture, enclosed in thorny barks. They grew older, and went on to the drier part of the tree; when the bark broke off, they lived a different kind of life there.
[9] FIRST MAN: The first man was born from creatures of a different kind; for creatures are pretty self-supporting, but man alone needs prolonged nursing. Man would not have survived if this were his original form.
[10] MEN AND FISH: The Syrians revere fish as being of a similar race and nurturing [so that fish and men were born in the same parents], which is better than what Anaximander thinks: namely, that originally men came to be inside fishes, and having been nurtured inside, like sharks, until they were able to fend for themselves, and then they'd take to the land.

[What is at issue?]
What is the first principle of the universe?
What is the nature, size, and scope of the Earth and sun?
Where did the first living creatures come from?

[What assumptions is Anaximander making?]
He assumes a material principle of the universe, and that only *one* could be that principle.
He assumes the shape and size of the earth; he doesn't give us a reason to believe he's correct about them.

3. **CLARIFICATION**:

No questions: I'll do my best to answer yours.

4. **PRAISE/CRITICISM/ANALYSIS**:

PRAISE:

- To my mind, Anaximander's notion of the *apeiron* is more philosophically satisfying than Thales' claim that all is made of water. To pick any one of the elements just doesn't seem plausible, for this (which is not his exact) reason – that they themselves are not able to be made from one another (except for air from water and water from air). But watch for Anaximenes!
- Kudos is also in order for his wanting to find natural explanations of phenomena, if you're a scientist, an evolutionist, or an atheist. I leave that assessment to you, without telling you what I believe on this front.
- [4] – [7]: These might be amusing to us now, but we have to keep in mind that these were some first guesses.
- [8] – [10]: Though his conclusions are wrong, his reasoning is actually pretty cool to witness – where *did* men come from, since they differ in their nursing needs from every other animal?

CRITICISM:

- [3] I think his reasoning that every element changes into other elements is false. Also, what is the *apeiron*? The Wikipedia entry for Anaximander says that it's not necessarily visible. But if it's material, don't we have to be able to perceive it in some way?
- [4] – [6], [8] – [10]: Incorrect. Oh well. There is still bad science today. Don't get me started! :)

- [7] FYI, the sun is 100 times the size of the earth, but it was a good first guess. [The sun's diameter is about 100 times the Earth's, and about 1,000,000 Earths would fit inside the sun.]

C. ANAXIMENES:

1. **BEARINGS**:

Anaximenes, pp. 12-13.

Anaximenes' life: Anaximenes lived from c. 585 BC–c. 525 BCE. He was born in Miletus, like Thales and Anaximander. We know just about nothing else, other than these fragments, so let's read on.

2. **OVERVIEW**:

[What are the main points of Anaximenes?]

[1] BIO: Anaximenes is the son of Eurystratus of Miletus, pupil of Anaximander. The material principle is air and the infinite; the stars move around the Earth (not under it). He was active around 546/5 BCE.

[2] BIO: Anaximenes attributed all the causes of things to "infinite air"; he believed that the gods did not create the air, but that they were made out of air.

[3] Diogenes [as well as Anaximenes] make air rather than water the material principle above other single bodies.

[4] The ultimate principle is infinite and air; it differs in its rarity and density. Becoming finer it becomes fire, being made thicker it becomes wind, then cloud; more dense, water; more dense, earth, then stones, and the rest come into being from these. He believes motion is eternal and that change comes about through motion.

[5] All things are produced by a kind of condensation and/or rarefaction of air. Motion exists from everlasting. When air melts, earth (flat) comes into existence; therefore, Earth floats on air. The sun, moon, and everything else in the sky have been created from earth (the element). The sun is made of the earth element but through the rapid motion it obtains heat in great sufficiency.

[6] [He repeats a bit – everything that has existed, does exist and will exist, including gods and things divine, ultimately comes from infinite air.] When air is most equable, it is invisible to sight, but it's revealed by the cold, hot, damp, and by movement. Air is always in motion (because nothing can change without motion). [He repeats the denser, finer process of fragment 4.] Stones are the most compressed that air can get and so are the most dense. This produces a continuum of hot to cold: <u>Fire – Air – Winds – Clouds – Water – Earth – Stones</u>.

[7] Air is a god and comes into being; it is measureless, infinite and always in motion. See Clarification for a question about the last phrase of the sentence here.

[8] EARTHQUAKE EXPLANATION: The earth, through being drenched and dried off, breaks asunder; so earthquakes happen when it's wet and dry – dryness causes drying up and cracks, and over-moistness makes earth crumble apart.

[What is at issue?]
What is the ultimate principle? Does it/they move always? Are gods made of the ultimate principle? How is everything else created by the ultimate principle? How can earthquakes happen when it's wet and dry?

[What assumption(s) is Anaximenes making?]
That there is one ultimate principle of the universe. That gods exist.

3. **CLARIFICATION**:

- [6] Clouds are created from “felting”? I think it’s layering the air, but I’m not sure.
- [7] Not sure what that last phrase is doing: “as though either formless air could be a god or mortality did not attend upon everything that has come into being”; it denies the first claim that air is a god and is measureless. My best guess is that this was written by someone like Aristotle, who mentioned Anaximenes’ view, but then criticized it.

4. **PRAISE/CRITICISM/ANALYSIS**:

PRAISE:

- Anaximenes does the best job so far on telling us how everything else can come from his one principle, air. Of course I am not saying that he is correct about everything, but just that his explanation is better than what we’ve seen thus far.
- It’s clever that he said something about how air is usually invisible, but that we have indications of it by cold, hot, damp, and its moving other things.

CRITICISM:

- [2] Infinite air is compatible with the universe’s being infinitely large; from my astronomy class at MCC, I learned that there is no edge to the universe, so could that imply that the amount of air is unlimited? On the other hand, air only occurs within atmospheres surrounding planets; not around stars or in space. So he is probably wrong about this.
- [4] and [5]: He says in [4] that motion is eternal; in [5] that motion “exists from everlasting”, which means to me that it has always existed in time. This is inconsistent: FYI, we’ll be using the term “eternal” to stand for something that is beyond or outside of time, and “everlasting” to something that is always in time, always has been and always will be. Some dictionaries hold that they are equivalent (my definition here of everlasting).
- [6] Stones aren’t the most dense thing; air itself – all of it – need not move all the time in order for change to occur. Anaximenes could have just stated that whenever something changes, it is due to air’s motion.