

ANAXAGORAS (Ἄναξαγόρας) OF CLAZOMENAE—son of Hegesibulos, b. around 500 BC, d. around 428 BC.

According to the accounts of his biographers and doxographers, he relinquished his family estate to devote himself to philosophy. Some of his doxographers say he was the son or companion of Anaximenes, which would show how he was linked with the Ionian philosophy of nature. The fall of Miletus in 494 BC certainly had some influence on the fact that he was the first philosopher associated with the intellectual milieu of Athens. He came to Athens around 480 and as a philosopher he taught Archelaus of Athens, Euripides the tragedian, and the demagogue Pericles with whom he remained a friend. It cannot be established whether he was in contact with Socrates or whether Socrates knew of Anaxagoras' views only through his writings. In 433, with Thucydides acting as prosecutor, he was charged with impiety and with being a Persian sympathizer. The charges were political in character and were in reality aimed at Pericles. The charges were based on a writing in which Anaxagoras stated that the sun is a incandescent lump of metal. Under the decree of Diopites, those who did not render worship to the gods of the state, introduced the worship of new gods into Athens, or those who spoke of the nature of the heavenly bodies, could be accused of impiety (ἄσεβεια [asébeia]). Socrates was charged and condemned under this decree and charges were later raised against Aristotle. It cannot be established whether the charges came to court; in any case Anaxagoras left Athens and spent the rest of his life in the Milesian colony of Lampsacus where he founded a philosophical school and lived the rest of his days surrounded by honor and respect. In his testament he asked that on the anniversary of his death the children of Lampsacus would have a free day from school. The people of Lampsacus raised an altar in honor of Anaxagoras dedicated to Reason (Νοῦς [Nous]) and Truth (Ἀλήθεια [Alétheia]).

Anaxagoras was the author of a lost work *On nature* (Περὶ φύσεως [Peri physeos]). The work was written in a beautiful and sublime style. As Plato and others relate, it was well-known and popular in Athens in the fifth century BC. Socrates knew the work well. Certain fragments and the major ideas of the work have been passed on by ancient philosophers and doxographers: Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Aetius, Hippolytus, and Simplicius.

Anaxagoras should be recognized as the last representative of the Ionian philosophy of nature which searched for first principles and causes (ἀρχή, ἀρχαί [arché, &archai]) in material elements (στοιχεῖα [stoichéia]). The Ionian philosophy of nature held various conceptions in turn; the conception of one material principle (Xenophanes of Colophon), the conception of organic matter that has its source of motion within itself (Empedocles of Acragas), and under the influence of Eleatic philosophy, the conceptions of the unity and indivisibility of principles. As a result of a confrontation between the principles of the Ionian philosophy of nature and the discoveries of the Eleatic school, Anaxagoras held that the first principles from which the world and all things arose were infinite (ἄπειρα [ápeira]) in number (πλήθει [pléthei]) and quality, and infinitesimal in size. He called them the “seeds of things” (σπερματὰ χρημάτων [spermata chrematon]) or “particles” (μοῖραι), while in Aristotle's version they were “homoiomere” (τὰ ὁμοιομερῆ [ta homoiomeré]). These particles were diverse, dissimilar, and irreducible. Before the world and the things in the world arose, the principles were a mixture (συμμιξίς [symmixis]). The mixture was so compact that the principles could not be separated and no principle appeared distinctly.

Anaxagoras continued the movement started by Empedocles of Acragas. He broke completely from Ionian hylezoism and denied that the source of motion and the power of acting is found in matter. The efficient cause of motion—both that of the first circular motion in a vortex (περιχωρεῖν, δίνη [perichoréin, dine]) which had the result that the particular principles gradually began to separate from each other, and motion in general—is Mind (Νοῦς). Mind is the form of the first being existing beyond and independently of the principles. Mind possesses a delicate substance different than the principles, as well as rationality and power. In Anaxagoras' cosmogony, the world first arose from principles in the motion of the vortex, and the primordial Mind started this motion. Because of the vortex the first mixture began to divide. The different structures of the world and the things in the world were separated out of it. Each of these structures contains all the primordial particles, and Mind is also contained in living things. In the process of cosmogony that which was rare was first to separate from that which was dense. The cold separated from the hot, the dark from the bright, and the wet from the dry. The dense, the wet, the cold, and the dark fell downward and formed the earth. The rare, the hot, the dry, and the bright rose upward. On the earth in turn, because the motion of the vortex was growing weaker, people and other living beings took form, as well as all things. Each thing is a structure composed of principles in such a way that a particle of all is in each. This process occurs in more than one world. An infinite number of parallel worlds took shape from the primordial mixture. Anaxagoras, like Anaximenes, thought that the earth was flat and was held up by air. Living things in their hierarchy (starting from plants, then animals, and then man) have a particle of Mind in them and this sets them apart from other things.

Anaxagoras explicitly stated in his philosophy that there is no coming-into-being (γενεσις) from what does not exist or destruction (φθορά [phthorá]) as a return to nothingness. Genesis or coming-into-being is basically a mixture of principles (συνμισησθαι [symmisgesthai]). Destruction is their separation (διακρινεσθαι [diakrimesthai]). Anaxagoras formulated a theory of sense impressions different from that of Empedocles. The theory was that we perceive “by opposites” (τοῖς ἐναντιοῖς [tois enantiois]): since in each thing there is a particle of everything else, then because of the cold in us we recognize and distinguish what is hot, and so forth, but sense impressions do not lead to a knowledge of the truth.

J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, Lo 1892, 1952⁴; Diels-Kranz I–III (passim); *Anaxagoras —testimonianze e frammenti* (ed. D. Lanza), Fi 1966; *The Fragments of Anaxagoras* (ed. D. Sider), Meisenheim am Glan 1981; G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, C 1957, 1983² (in Polish: *Filozofia przedsokratejska*, Wwa-Pz 1999).

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