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ORIGIN AND ARCHE IN
MYTHOPOEIC AND MILESIAN THOUGHT

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Introduction

On the whole, scholars who have dealt with the interpretation of the Pre-Socratic fragments, and more particularly with those few fragments that report the supposed writings or sayings of the early Milesians, have ranged themselves in one of two schools of thought. On the one hand, exponents of a more "rationalist" interpretation of the Milesians, such as Burnet, Kahn, and, to a lesser extent, Kirk and Raven, have insisted that the trend of thought detectable in the fragments exhibits a complete revolution within the history of ideas. According to these scholars, the Milesians are considered to be the innovators of scientific thinking, to be true physicists in our modern sense of the word.[1] Needless to say, these scholars regard the advent of Milesian philosophy as something new, unprecedented and completely distinct from any mythopoeic thought that had preceded it. Burnet puts this very clearly: "It is therefore quite wrong to look for the origins of Ionian science in mythological ideas of any kind."[2] To support his thesis, Burnet gives us detailed arguments which include evidence from geography, history, etymology, and an analysis of mythopoeic thought itself, all aimed at proving the practical impossibility of any infiltration of mythic elements into the thought of the Milesians.[1]

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[1] For a statement of this very popular view, see for example, J.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge: The University Press, 1962), p.73.

[2] John Burnet, Early Greek Philosophy (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1930), p.13.

On the other hand, other scholars, like Cornford, Guthrie and Paul Seligman, have traced a very solid influence of mythological conceptions on the thought of the Milesians. While Guthrie and Seligman in this respect hold a more moderate position, Cornford has tried to prove that Ionian cosmogonical thought is on the whole nothing but a rationalization of mythological notions that can be traced back to earlier and more "primitive" sources. Referring to Thales, for instance, Cornford points out (and this is the core of his main thesis on the Presocratics) that in "the very first utterance of philosophy, we encounter conceptions which have a long history, as religious representations, before philosophy begins. Unless we have some grasp of that history we are not likely to understand the speculation, which, however scientific its spirit may be, constantly operated with these religious ideas, and is to a large extent confined in its movement within the limits already traced by them."[2]

Considering the scanty and often highly dubious evidence relating to the early Ionians, it is not difficult to see how either positions can be defended or upheld. Generally, the exponents of the rationalist school of interpretation proceed to prove their thesis by disregarding the more obscure passages that seem to be more "poetic" than rational, or by suggesting that other passages may not be authentically Ionian but reflect Aristotelian terminology and ideas.[1] On the other hand, scholars bent on proving the influence of myth on the Ionians have very often resorted to religious ideas (such as for instance, the Orphic mysteries and theogonies), which were themselves probably introduced much later than the sixth century B.C., and could not possibly be said to have the influence claimed by them.[2]

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[1] The relevant part of these arguments will be considered further on.

[2] F.M.Cornford, From Religion to Philosophy (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp.4-5.

Presented in this form, the two alternative approaches to the Ionians seem to be mutually exclusive, as though the fragments relating to the early Presocratics can lend themselves perfectly to either one of the two interpretations, but not to both. The object of this study is to disprove this point. I believe that both approaches, the rationalist and the mythic are necessary, in order to do full justice to the admittedly confusing fragments. Rather than begin with either of these approaches in seclusion from the other, I have chosen to use a more "phenomenological" approach, one that tries to deal with the fragments in the way they present themselves to us. The evidence from the fragments is complex, showing signs of innovation as well as continuity, presupposing a number of earlier mythological notions but again dealing with them in a new fashion. I believe it is better to "look at" the fragments with as little prejudice as possible, to see them in as many meaningful ways as we are capable of, than to replace them in their occasionally contradictory variety with a more consistent and neat picture of our own devising. The Milesians are neither abrupt innovators merely nor slavish imitators merely; they are not true scientists or true religious men repeating earlier mythopoeic notions, but contain elements of both. If there is one thing about the picture of the early Milesians reported by the fragments that we can be sure of, it is their combination of traditional notions with startingly new ones. It is the object of my paper to point out how many traditional notions, mainly mythopoeic, remain in the fragments and also to determine how much is a new departure from the old. In order to see to what extent the Milesians assumed and presupposed earlier conceptions of origin and creation we have to find out what exactly is involved in the mythopoeic view of origin which preceded them. At the same time, a study of mythopoeic conceptions will also help to reveal to what extent the early Milesians departed from traditional thought.

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[1] See for example Burnet's treatment of Anaximander; in particular, John Burnet, op.cit., p.52 n.6.

[2] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p.46.

The first part of this study will therefore be an analysis of myths of creation and myths that deal with creation in any of its forms, i.e., cosmogonical myths that deal with the creation of the world and myths that deal with the creation of individual phenomena within this world, buth human and natural.[1] In the second part, the concept of the arche, (origin, or beginning, or principle), will be dealt with. I shall base my analysis on the evidence of the Presocratic fragments that refer to Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes. In this way, I will be able to show, first, the similarities and differences that exist between early mythopoeic conceptions of origin and creation and the cosmogonical theories of the Ionians. I will show, secondly, that neither single view of the Ionians (whether one considers that they used solely mythopoeic conceptions and beliefs, or considers that they completely rejected them) can be understood without first seeing what it is that had preceded them conceptually, which they accepted or which they rejected.

It is highly difficult, (not to say improbable) to conceive of any "new" or revolutionary process of thought emerging from a complete vacuum, as Burnet would have us believe. And even if this were the case, we would owe it to ourselves to understand what myth is, if only in order to realize and appreciate the precise extent of that conceptual "novelty". Furthermore, as we shall see, an attempt to formulate precisely a number of mythopoeic notions involved in the concept of creation will help us clarify a great many of the Ionian fragments which otherwise remain obscure and of little relevance to an appreciation of their thought.

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[1] Not that the distinction between "human" and what is "natural" can be very clearly made.

PART ONE

I The Interpretation of Myth

The word 'myth', or *mythos* in Greek, originally signified 'words', 'speech', or 'narrative', having as its hypothetical Indo-European root, the words *mud*, or *mudh*, meaning to think, or to imagine. Originally, the Greek *mythos* is practically synonymous with the word 'logos', which also has, as one of its significations, 'narrative', 'discourse', or 'continuous statement'.[1] In the *Theaetetus*, one of the meanings of the word 'logos' is stated as 'account', or 'narrative';[2] while *legein* is described as the act of using words.[3] By the time of Plato, both words have gradually acquired connotations that go beyond this basic similarity, so that they are used to mean antithetical things. For Plato, as for us today in one sense, *logos* is associated with reason, truth and logic, and myth with imagination, fantasy, and as often used by scientists today, with falsehood, or at best, naivete.

There is another sense in which the word 'myth' is used today quite falsely, a sense in which it was used predominantly in the nineteenth century. Here we see the word applied to any work of the imagination, in a totally indiscriminate sense to include fable, saga, allegory, epic poetry, and a number of other things which myth is not. It could truly be said that most of the major studies of myth of the twentieth century have been undertaken precisely to dissipate this confusion. There are several ways in which scholars have attempted to find out exactly how and in what sense a myth differs from other forms of narrative that exist within an archaic society.[1] One way has been to find out what exactly the function of myth is within a particular archaic group by studying the response and behaviour of the individuals within that group as they participate in a ritual. This has been done by a number of anthropologists working with tribes all over the world, notably by Levy-Bruhl, Malinowski, Margaret Mead, etc. Another method used by Mircea Eliade, Jane Harrison, H.J.Rose, Gaster, and a number of others, more interested in the theoretical aspect of the study of myth, has been to make use of the findings of the anthropologists, as well as to study the classical Greek, Hebrew and Indian myths themselves and to trace them back to any earlier sources they might have, in an attempt to discover their sociological, ontological or other signification for a given people in a given context. It is interesting to note that the nineteenth century attempt (made most notably by Max Muller) to discover universal and eternal religious truths within the myths has been given up almost totally. Myths are no longer regarded as concealing beneath their naive and childish aspect, a "grandiose conception of certain fundamental religious truths, and in particular of monotheism" as held by Friedrich Creuzer.[1] They are taken at their face value, simply to be interpreted as sacred stories, which, if they reveal anything, reveal not abstract, universal ideas, but the kind of mentality that produced them, i.e., the way the mythopoeic mind works.

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[1] Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1958), pp.347, 348, 424.

[2] Plato, "Theaetetus", *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (ed.),(New York: Bollingen Foundation,1964), 908.

[3] Socrates describes the word as "giving overt expression to one's thought by means of vocal sound with names and verbs", *ibid.*,p.914

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[1] It is important to note that I will be using the term, 'archaic', throughout this study to refer not to any particular period of history, such as, let us say, the ninth to the seventh century B.C. I intend it to refer to a pre-logical or pre-scientific state of mind up to and preceding the Milesians. In this sense, it is a better word than 'primitive', with its connotations of inferiority. The way I have chosen to use 'archaic' then, is more or less as a synonym of 'mythopoeic', i.e., archaic man as being man with a mythopoeic conception of the world.

There are at least twelve kinds of narrative from which myth must be distinguished.[2] For our purposes, it is enough to point out the distinguishing features of myth as opposed to two forms of narrative with which it is most often confused. In this way we shall be able to come to a few primary conclusions as to some essential characteristics of myth itself.

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[1] H.J.Rose, A Handbook of Greek Mythology (New York: E.P.Dutton,1959), p.3.

[2] For a full list of the narratives from which myth must be distinguished, see Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), Vo.I, p.10.

In the first place, myth is most often confused with allegory , due mainly to the superficial similarity that is seen in the language used by both: both myth and allegory use peotical expressions and metaphors. The difference between the two, however, resides mainly in the fact that while the imagery of allegory is separable from its more abstract signification which it consciously conceals, or contains, the imagery of myth is "inseperable from the thought".[1] This can be seen best when one compares the characterization of the gods in the two forms of narrative. While allegory will treat the gods as mere personifications of abstract ideas, myths deal with their gods as full-fledged personalities. Let us briefly look at two passages in the Iliad and the Aeneid respectively, where the contrast between a mythical and allegorical treatment of the gods Ares and Mars is well brought out.

In the Iliad, although Ares is the god of war, he is never identified with war as its personification. That is to say, one cannot, without the risk of falling into absurdity, proceed to look at all the passages in which Ares appears allegorically, i.e., as concealing the abstract notion of war, or strife.

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[1] Henri Frankfort et.al., Before Philosophy (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1951), p.15.

Let us look at one passage where Ares appears:

> Now as the high-hearted Trojans watched the two sons of Dares,
> One running away, and one cut down by the side of his chariot,
> the anger in all of them was stirred. But grey-eyed Athens
> took violent Ares by the hand, and in words she spoke to him:
> 'Ares, Ares, manslaughtering, blood-stained, stormer of strong walls,
> shall we not leave the Trojans and Achaians to struggle
> after whatever way Zeus father grants glory to either,
> while we two give ground together and avoid Zeus'anger?'
> So she spoke, and led violent Ares out of the fighting
> and afterwards caused him to sit down by the sands of Skamandros
> while the Danaans bent the Trojans back, and each of the princes
> killed his man. (Bk. V, 30).[1]

Had the treatment of this passage been allegorical, i.e., Ares been considered as the abstract idea, strife, the very retreat of Ares from the battlefield would have resulted in the ceasing of the battle for the moment, until his return. However, we are told that the battle goes on after his departure, and as we see in the rest of the book, it goes on with even greater gusto. Which points out very clearly to us that Ares is not primarily war, but a god whose character although it includes attributes of "man-slaughtering", is not limited to that solely.

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[1] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p.129. Although we are not dealing with myth proper here, but with 'mythical treatment', the same remarks apply equally well to the characterization of the gods in any myth.

In contrast to the depiction of Ares that we saw in the above quoted passage of the Iliad, we have the following reference to Mars (God of War) in the Aeneid:

> And now Mars, Lord of Arms, gave more heart and more strength to the Latins, sharply goading their spirit and twisting the goad, and on the Trojans he unleashed the demons, Rout and black Panic. From all parts of the field the Latins gathered where the chance for action offered. The Warrior God swooped down into their hearts. (ix.696)[1]

Here we have a purely allegorical treatment of the god Mars, where the personality of the god is sacrificed for the sake of the abstract idea, "war" or "strife", which could very easily be substituted for the god himself. In other words, Mars is brought in simply to emphasize poetically and more strikingly an idea that exists perfectly without him.[2] We can conclude then, that while allegory lends itself perfectly to an abstract interpretation (and indeed this is its conscious aim as a literary technique) which is its meaningful equivalent, myth does not, not only because it is not intended to express abstract or rational ideas, but also because these ideas were not present to the mythopoeic mind itself, as we shall have occasion to find out.

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[1] Virgil, The Aeneid, Trans. W.F.Jackson Knight (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1956), p.247.

[2] Probably the best example of allegory exhibiting all of the characteristics mentioned above insofar as the expression of abstract ideas is concerned, would be Plato's allegory of the cave.

Opposed to the tendency of looking for hidden abstract significations in myth is the tendency to dismiss myth totally as a serious religious expression. This attitude is exemplified mainly in confusing myth with folk-tale and fable. In other words, myth is considered to be an imaginative excursion, having solely as its aim the amusement of archaic man. One of the most interesting account of the difference between myth and folk-tale is given to us by Bronislaw Malinowski, who bases his conclusion on the studies he made during his stay among a Melanesian tribe of New Guinea.[1] Without going into too much detail, it is enough for our purposes to point out the following: the main difference that exists between myth and folk-tale is not so much in the content of either, but mainly in the different attitude that archaic man evinces towards the two. The folk-tale, we are told, is a "seasonal performance and an act of sociability."[2] A number of folk-tales are recounted every year at a specific time by various members of the community who believe in a very vague way that the act of recounting the tales will in some way have some kind of influence on the crops. The important thing about the folk-tale, however, is that while the natives believe that the folk-tale is amusing, and its contents not to be taken very seriously, the myths, in comparison, are recounted with the utmost seriousness as *events which actually happened* in the past. In Malinowski's own words,

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[1] Bronislaw Malinowski, Magic, Science and Religion (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948), pp. 96-111.

[2] Ibid., p. 107.

> there exists a special class of stories, regarded as sacred, embodied in ritual, morals, and social organization, and which form an integral and active part of primitive culture. These stories live not by idle interest, not as fictitious or even as true narratives; but are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them.[1]

The utmost seriousness of myth therefore, does not reside solely in the fact that myth relates a series of events which *actually happened* in the primeval past as opposed to folk-tale, which deals with fictitious or imaginary events. Myth is treated with utmost seriousness mainly because it deals with a *sacred* reality which although it happened in the past, still has the *power* greatly to affect the *present*.

Before going any further, let us briefly recapitulate and restate what this comparison between myth, allegory and folk-tale has shown us. We have tried to point out that on the one hand myth can neither be treated as a story which, although it appears primitive and poetical, conceals abstract truths, nor on the other hand, can it be dismissed as mere fantasy, fairy-tale or folk-tale, originally invented for the sake of amusement and entertainment. It seems to me that both confusions stem from the same basic error: myth is not something that exists in itself or that can be understood as a story with absolutely no connection with the religion or the mentality that conceived it. Rather than asking the question, "What does this myth mean?" and running the risk, with our twentieth century mind, of answering either "A number of universal truths", or, "A lot of imagination, but no factual truth," we should rather begin by asking: "What is the importance of myth to archaic man?" We are thus putting the question primarily in the context of function, rather than of meaning, and in this way we shall discover that we have done the right thing, since ultimately the meaning of myth resides primarily in its function within archaic man's life.

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[1] Bronislaw Malinowski, ibid., *Magic, Science and Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948), p. 108.

If, as we have already mentioned, the importance of myth in archaic man's life resides in the fact that it has the power to affect man in all of his activities, how can we understand the complex notion that a story which relates something that happened in the past still has the power in some mysterious way of affecting the present?

Let us first examine carefully what it is exactly that myth narrates and how it does so. According to Mircea Eliade, true myth is a sacred story which invariably narrates how something came into being, or originated.[1] Thus we can provisionally divide the large body of myths that exist into two main categories: the cosmogonical myths that deal with the creation of the world, or more generally of the universe, and the myths that recount how any phenomenon within the world, human or natural, originated. To the mythopoeic mind, the notion of origin is always associated with an act[2], or more specifically, with the act of a divine being or god. Every origin is thus a divine origin in the sense that every origin is a creation. To the mythopoeic mind then, to know the sacred origins of a law, a practice, or of any crucial event in life, is to know why that phenomenon is as it is in terms of how it was originally brought into being, and most important, in terms of who it was that created it; and this is precisely what myth narrates.

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[1] Mircea Eliade, Aspects du Mythe (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p.15. This definition of myth as being the story of a creation might be too narrow in the sense that scholars should classify as myths, a great deal of narratives which does not necessarily relate to creation. Thus, H.J.Rose, op.cit.,p.12, although he admits that a great number of myths deal with the notion of origin in all of its forms (myths which he calls 'aetiological'), he does not limit the definition of myth solely to the aetiological myth. We do not have to spend any time, however, defending either position. The concern of this study being mainly with myths of origin, Eliade's approach to myth is of particular relevance to us, even though it might not do justice to other forms of myth.

[2] Henri Frankfort et. al., op.cit., p.24.

It is very tempting to view the function of myth within archaic man's life as primarily explanatory. If myth narrates the sacred origins of a particular phenomenon, could we not conclude that myth arose primarily out of the desire to explain that phenomenon, i.e., to attribute causes to it? This kind of theory is given very good expression by H.J.Rose, who tells us that myth is

> the result of the working of naive imagination upon the facts of experience. As a large proportion of these facts are natural phenomena, it follows that the nature-myth is a common kind; and as the imagination is commonly set going by an object which appears wonderful or puzzling, it follows that a very large proportion indeed of myths is of the kind known as aetiological, concerned, that is, with the causes of all manner of things from the apparent movement of the heavenly bodies to the shape of a neighbouring hill or the origin of a local custom.[1]

According to this view, myth is made the direct precursor of science, exhibiting the kind of interest in causes (in a naive and primitive way) that science later perfects. Thus, C.M.Bowra tells us,

> A myth is a story which aims not at giving pleasure for its own sake but at alleviating perplexities which trouble pre-scientific man because his reason is not yet ready to grasp them. Before men advance to general concepts, they think in individual pictorial images, and if they are to come to terms with something puzzling or unfamiliar, it must be brought into the orbit of such imagery and acclimatized to it.[2]

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[1] H.J.Rose, op.cit.,p.12. Cf Bronislaw Malinowski,op.cit.,p.110.

[2] C.M.Bowra, The Greek Experience (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1957), p.103.

Examples of this kind of theory abound and we could go on quoting passages indefinitely.

The main trouble with the theory that sees myth as some kind of primitive "explanation" of the world, is simply that it tends to regard myth as "a primitive intellectual armchair occupation",[1] a kind of theoretical endeavour, removed from the socio-religious context of archaic man. In this way, it becomes very difficult for such theories to take into account the close relation of myth and ritual. If myth is concerned with 'explaining' phenomena, or with attributing 'causes' to baffling events, how is it that one is going to account for the fact that archaic man himself resorts to myth for other more important reasons than a simple intellectual excursion?

It is primarily to ritual that one has to turn in order to understand the significance of myth and of the notion of origin in the context of mythopoeic thought.

In his book, "Aspects du Mythe", Mircea Eliade cites the following examples:

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[1] Bronislaw Malinowski, _op.cit._, p.110

> Lorsque le missionnaire-ethnologue C. Strehlow demandait aux Australiens Arunta pourquoi il celebraient certaines cérémonies, on lui repondait invariablement: 'Parce que les ancêtres l'ont ainsi prescrit'. Les Kai de la Nouvelle Guinee refusaient de modifier leur maniere de vivre et de travailler, et ils s'en expliquaient: 'C'est ainsi qu'ont fait les Nemu (les Ancetres mythiques) et nous faisons de la meme facon.' Interroge sur la raison de tel detail d'une ceremonie, le chanteur Navaho repondait: 'Parce que le Peuple saint le fit de cette maniere la premiere fois'.... C'est aussi la justification invoquee par les theologiens et les ritualistes hindous: 'Nous devons faire ce que les dieux ont fait au commencement'."[1]

On the basis of the few examples quoted above, we can gather what the relation of myth to ritual is: myth is the justification of ritual in the sense that it serves as a model for the ritual to imitate. The gods, mythical ancestors and other divine beings have acted in a certain way 'in the beginning', in primordial times, and what the ritual does is to imitate the original, divine act. This then is the primary function of myth, i.e., that it becomes the sacred pattern for the guidance of ritual. What exactly then, is the signification of ritual practice insofar as it imitates the mythical model? Why is it that ritual is justified principally as a reenactment of what happened in mythical time, the time of 'sacred beginnings'?

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[1] Mircea Eliade, op.cit., p.16f.
For numerous other examples, see Lucien Levy-Bruhl, La Mentalité Primitive (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1925).

To understand this very crucial notion, we have to turn to Mircea Eliade's distinction between the sacred and the profane. According to Eliade, what is sacred for the mythopoeic mind is primarily what reveals itself to man as 'wholly other'.[1] It does not reveal itself as 'wholly other' in the sense that Rudolf Otto intended, i.e., as totally irrational in opposition to a series of events in nature which are supposed to occur according to a certain scientific pattern of rationality.[2] Indeed, this distinction between sacred irrationality and profane reason, does not present itself to the mythopoeic mind whose concept of nature is totally different from ours today.[3] The closest we can come to expressing the distinction that the mythopoeic mind finds between the sacred and the profane is to say that the sacred reveals itself as 'powerful' as 'real', as 'meaningful', as 'awesome', in opposition to the profane which can only be experienced as a negation of what is sacred. The sense of unreality of the profane is what gives it this negative character. The profane is what is not sacred, what lacks sacredness and what therefore has to be grounded in the sacred in order to become 'real' and meaningful.[1] Although these are concepts which are not consciously recognized by the archaic mind, they exist unmistakably as latent within the ritualistic practices of archaic man which cannot be fully understood without them. If the profane is experienced as a lack of sacredness however, the breach between it and the sacred is not a final one. Archaic man constantly tries to "give" reality to the profane by grounding it in the sacred, and this can only be done by means of ritual. In ritual, man imitates the original acts of the gods at the moment of creation of a phenomenon, and in this way, the sacredness of this specific phenomenon is ensured. That is to say, primitive man feels the need not only to ground profane phenomena in the reality of the sacred by attributing mythical origins to those phenomena, but furthermore, he feels that this sacredness has to be constantly renewed through his own efforts, by means of rituals which, by imitating the primordial creation, maintain the relation between the sacred and the profane.[2]

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[1] Mircea Eliade, Le Sacre et le Profane (Paris: Gallimard,1965),p.15.

[2] Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), in particular, pp.1-4 and 12-23.

[3] For a discussion of the mythopoeic concept of 'nature', see Lucien Levy-Bruhl, op.cit., in particular, pp.17-45.

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[1] "If we observe the general behaviour of archaic man we are struck by the following fact: neither the objects of the external world nor human acts, properly speaking, have any autonomous intrinsic value. Objects or acts acquire a value and in so doing become real, because they participate after one fashion or another in a reality that transcends them."
Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History (New York: Harper & Bros.,1954), p.3f.

[2] Mircea Eliade, Ibid., pp.27f.

The profane is therefore grounded in the sacred by means of a 'return' to, and a reiteration of, events which happened in the primordial past. It is difficult for us today, mainly due to our conception of time, to fully understand how it is that one can recapitulate as it were, something that happened in the past and actually believe that it has become the present. When archaic man proceeds to imitate a creation undertaken by the gods in the primordial past, he believes that he is actually re-creating that past, that he is actualizing it into an immediate sacred presence. It would be worthwhile to spend some time analyzing the mythopoeic distinction between the sacred and the profane in the context of archaic man's concept of space and time, in order to fully understand the mythopoeic importance of sacred origins and mythical creation.

II Mythopoeic Conception of Space & Time

The mythopoeic mind does not possess a true 'concept' of time or space, in our modern understanding of the word. In Cassirer's terms, the archaic mind has a 'presentative acquaintance' of time and space, rather than 'representative knowledge'.[1] A concept usually tends to lend itself to abstract definition; we can have a philosophical discussion today, on what, for instance, "time-in-itself", stripped of all of its historical connotations, might mean. This "representation" of time is foreign to the mythopoeic mind. "The mythopoeic conception of time is, like that of space, qualitative and concrete, not quantitative and abstract".[2] Early man cannot, as we are capable of doing today, abstract a concept of time and space from his immediate experience of these two concrete realities.

If, however, early man does not have the ability to speculate philosophically about space and time, 'presentative acquaintance' is not all that he has. To use Mircea Eliade's phrase, he also has a "primary religious experience" of space and time that precedes any speculation about the world.[1] It is to this religious experience, which is highly emotional, that we shall turn in an attempt to discover the significance of time and space to the archaic mind.

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[1] Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1954), p.67f. What Cassirer means by these two terms is simply that archaic man does not have the ability to think in symbolical and purely abstract terms of space and time, but only has the ability to move effectively in space, for instance, due to familiarity with the surroundings. Early man knows the river that he rows his boat in perfectly, but is incapable of drawing a map of the river. Here Levy-Bruhl would disagree; some primitive tribes are perfectly capable of drawing an accurate map of a whole region of which they have never even had a bird's eye view. cf., Levy-Bruhl, op.cit., p.234f and 407.

[2] Henri Frankfort et.al., op.cit., p.32.

Because our concept of time is necessarily determined by our concept of causality which appears to us as an order in space, we conceive of time as linear. In so far as every cause has a determined effect and in so far as the order between causes-effect-causes, and so on, is irremediable and irreversible, then time seems to be composed of events that move in a straight line. This order of events can very neatly be divided into what is a past, present and future, and again we conceive of this arrangement spatially: what is past is behind, what is present immediate, and what is future ahead.[2] Furthermore, we tend to conceive of the time and space in which events occur as to a certain extent indifferent to the events contained in them or else as indistinguishable from the events themselves.

The mythopoeic mind does not live in terms of this conception of time and space, for three main reasons. In the first place, effects and their 'causes', or more strictly speaking, their 'origin', are not seen as forming a series with measureable intervals; therefore time is not and cannot be conceived of as linear.[1] Causes and their effects have an immediate relationship and thus any sense of time lapse that might occur between the one and the other does not present itself to their minds. That is to say, if for example, a man drinks some poison which has a slow effect, and in the moments preceding his death another event intervenes, such as, for instance, his coming into contact with anything that is taboo, then it is the latter that is held responsible for his death, since the actual imbibing of the poison did not occur immediately before he died. Furthermore, the mythopoeic conception of 'causality', does not admit of 'natural' origins in any modern sense. Any significant event has its origins in supernatural or divine intervention which acts immediately in the context of human events.

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[1] Mircea Eliade, Le Sacré et le Profane, p.21

[2] See for a full discussion of this spatial conception of time, Thorlief Boman, Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek (London: SCM Press, 1960), pp.123-128.

Secondly, because time is not conceived of as linear, the idea of a past, present and future, each succeeding the other in irreversible order, is nonexistent to the mythopoeic mind. Past, present and future are capable of being merged into one not very distinct 'apprehension', so that the notion of intervals existing between periods of time that can only be crossed one at a time is unthinkable. Events can be both future and present at the same time.[1] In the same way, events can be both past and present at the same time. Finally, there is no conception of time and space as equally homogeneous: events manifest themselves as occurring in a time of their own which might be good or evil, and events reveal themselves in a space of their own which might be sacred or profane, cosmic or chaotic.

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[1] For a more detailed analysis of the mythopoeic notion of causality, see Levy-Bruhl, op.cit., pp.17-45 and 80-85.

For archaic man, space is primarily something 'qualitative':

> Pour les primitifs, la representation de l'espace, comme celle du temps, si tant est qu'ils en aient une expresse, est surtout qualitative. Les regions de l'espace ne sont pas concues, ni proprement representées, mais plutot senties dans des ensembles complexes, ou chacune est inseparable de ce qui l'occupe.[2]

Every area is intimately connected with the animals, people, gods, spirits of the dead, etc., that reside in it. The space in which this complexity of gods, humans and animals reside is not a neutral container solely. It is a relation that is as close and inseparable as a name or possession. Once a human being who has lived in an area which he has to come to consider as part of himself, ventures out of his part of space into an unknown region, then everything appears as hostile to him because all the things which he had been capable of participating in within his own space, are no longer present.[1] This feeling of isolation is in some ways comparable to our present day feelings of 'homesickness', or sense of loss when we leave behind a familiar area. However, what makes the experience more crucial for early man is not solely the feeling of isolation, as it were, from his own self, but the sense of opening himself up to all the terrors of a non-consecrated area: a chaos.

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[1] Lucien Levy-Bruhl, op.cit., p.219.

[2] Ibid., 231f.

To the mythopoeic mind, the conception of space is inseparable from the notion of movement in space. Any spatial reality is by definition a reality that implies the possibility of transition and passage from one point to another.[2] This sense of the possibility of endless motion, however, causes a feeling of tension, so that there is a constant effort made to seek a central point, a fixed point as it were, to end the tension provoked by the vastness which space represents. That is why, as has been pointed out, we find the couple Hermes-Hestia often associated in Greek mythology.[1] Hermes is the messenger-god, the god of movement, whose job is to speed back and forth, relaying messages. He is constantly appearing and disappearing, a trickster who is never in one place at once. Hestia, on the other hand, is the goddess of the hearth, whose position is always at the center of the home. She, in contrast to Hermes, represents stability and fixity symbolized in the central position of the hearth. Together they express the complementary notions of restlessness which constantly seeks for stability. Thus,

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[1] Probably the one work of fiction which has been capable of grasping the fundamental ways in which the mythopoeic mind works is Hermann Hesse's Magister Ludi, in particular the section entitled, "The Rainmaker", where he vividly describes early man's intimate relation with his space and the terrors he experiences when he adventures out into the surrounding Chaos.

[2] J.P.Vernant, Mythe et Pensée Chez les Grecs (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1965), p.101.

> On peut dire que le couple Hermes-Hestia exprime, dans sa polarite, la tension qui se marque dans la representation archaique de l'espace: l'espace exige un centre, un point fixe, a valeur privilegiee, a partir duquel on puisse orienter et definir des directions, toutes differentes qualitativement; mais l'espace se presente en meme temps comme lieu du mouvement ce qui implique une possibilite de transition et de passage de n'importe quel point a un autre.[2]

Space then, because it is precisely that which implies possibility of motion, that through which one can constantly, like the god Hermes, move, is also that which requires, in order to end the tension of erratic movement, a center, or a point de repere to organize one's life around. In the context of mythopoeic expression, this center is usually located at the point where the sacred manifests itself:

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[1] They are often represented together on ancient Greek vases but their close relation is most vividly depicted in the Homeric Hymn to Hestia, ibid., pp.97-108.

[2] Ibid., p.101.

> Lorsque le sacre se manifeste... il n'y a pas seulement rupture dans l'homogeneite de l'espace, mais aussi revelation d'une realite absolue, qui s'oppose a la non-realite de l'immense etendue environnante. La manifestation du sacre fonde ontologiquement le Monde. Dans l'etendue homogene et infinie, ou aucun point de repere n'est possible, dans laquelle aucune orientation ne peut s'effectuer, la hierophanie revele un 'point fixe' absolu, un 'Centre'.[1]

When the sacred reveals itself in space there is primarily a shutting off of a certain area from all the surrounding space, which in opposition to the limited area in which the sacred reveals itself, appears as unreal, unknown and chaotic. That is to say, the revelation of the sacred in a chosen area of space provides man with a point around which he can center his life and thus bulwark himself against the surrounding ill-defined chaos. The point at which the sacred manifests itself, however, is also much more than a point de repere in space, it is that part of space at which the world of the profane is 'opened' towards the reality of the sacred.[2] We have an ambivalent notion here: the Center at which the sacred manifests itself is both what gives reality to the ill-defined space which surrounds man and at the same time it is the point at which man is in direct contact with the world of the gods. That is to say, the Center is what helps man orient himself with regards to *shutting* himself off from the surrounding Chaos while at the same time providing man with a point in space where his life is *opened* to the sacred. The main area of worship, then, inevitably localises itself in the Center, too, at the crucial point of access to the divine. Thus, altar, temple or hearth, become the *axis mundi*, *oomphalos*, *Center*, terms which all indicate that the area is sacred because it is located at the point where the Divine has revealed itself and is in constant communication with man.[1]

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[1] Mircea Eliade, Le Sacre et le Profane, p.22.

[2] Ibid., p.29

The original creation of the World, itself viewed too as what is separated from Chaos in most mythopoeic traditions, also occurs at the Center.[2] A study of rituals associated with the foundation of any holy site, temple or altar, reveals to us that the procedure of the ritual is a close imitation of the original Creation of the world as reported by the myth.[3] The rituals (particularly in ancient Indian religion) associated with the consecration of a center of worship, reenact the Creation of the world in the belief that just as the original creation separated cosmos from chaos, in the same way the area of worship is grounded in the sacred reality of the original act, i.e., in a Center that is bulwarked against the surrounding chaos.

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[1] Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 12ff

[2] Ibid., pp. 12-17.

[3] Mircea Eliade, *Le Sacré et le Profane*, 31ff

This repetition of the original cosmic Creation is one attempt, among many others, made by archaic man to co-ordinate his own life with cosmic events.[1] In this sense, then, a ritual that reiterates the specific acts of the gods, whether at the moment of Creation, or otherwise, does not only make the participant share the act of the god, i.e., become the god's contemporary, but also helps to _regenerate_ the participant's own _time_ by _creating_ it anew.[2] What the ritual does is to go back into the past, into the primordial reality of the sacred, in order to ground the present ontologically.

> Le passe ainsi devoile est beaucoup plus que l'antecedant du present: il en est la source. En remontant jusqu'a lui, la rememoration cheche non a situer les evenements dans un cadre temporel, mais a atteindre le fond de l'etre, a decouvrir l'originel, la realite primordiale dont est issu le cosmos et qui permet de comprendre le devenir dans son ensemble.[3]

The archaic mind makes a distinction between events that happened in the sacred past, in _illo tempore_, to use Eliade's expression, and events that occur in profane time, which appears as 'simple temporal duration'.[1] The distinction is not at all akin to what we might consider to be past and our actual present existence. For archaic man, the past of sacred beginnings can not only become _actually present_ by means of ritual, but it is _necessary_ that every once in a while it _become_ present in order to infuse new life into the present. That is because the sacred past is not a period of time which lies _behind_ the present and which separates itself from the present by means of an 'interval'. The sacred past is, at it were, a _potential present_ because it can always, by means of ritual, become the present and thus infuse sacred life into it. When the ritual reiterates events of the sacred past, it is not 'going back' to the past, but simply plumbing its own depths, its own _origins_, in order to regenerate the present.

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[1] Henri Frankfort, et.al., _op.cit._, p.35.

[2] Mircea Eliade, _Le Sacré et le profane_, p.65.

[3] Jean-Pierre Vernant, _op.cit._, p.57.

If time is not irremediable to the archaic mentality then, and if events that happened in the primordial past are capable of being reenacted over and over again in ritual, then it becomes of the greatest importance to know and to remember exactly what happened in the past in all its totality, i.e., to remember the myths.[2]

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[1] Mircea Eliade, _ibid_., p.60.

[2] Theodore H. Gaster, _Thespis_ (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961), p.24.

The importance of remembering the myths gives archaic man the directions for ritual and also gives him the secret of the origins of things.[1] To know the origin of things is to be capable of imitating in ritual these origins, and thus to have the power of continuously grounding events into the sacred, i.e., ensuring the sacredness of the cosmos in which man lives, i.e., providing constant contact with the divine.

By imitating through ritual events that happen in the primordial past, the events related by the myths, early man orders and co-ordinates his own life, and at the same time that of the cosmos to which he belongs, with that of the sacred reality of the divine. Spatially, by building his area of worship in the Center in which the divine reveals itself, he imitates the early cosmogonical creation, and thus ensures that the space surrounding him has been shut off from Chaos. Temporally, by going back to the primordial past and imitating events that happened in that past, early man derives value and sacredness for his own time. The fact that the cosmic order derives sacredness from its divine origin is not however viewed by early man as a _fait_ _accompli_. The sacredness of the cosmos has to be constantly renewed. "The renewal, however, is not effected by grace of superior providence or by any automatic law of nature; for of such the primitive has no conception. Rather has it to be fought for and won by the concerted effort of men."[1] This 'effort' we saw exemplified in ritualistic behaviour. Early man is therefore not solely a spectator viewing with awe and wonder and detachment the great order and holiness of the cosmos. He is involved in its very life as an active participant who has to ensure that this order and sacredness are maintained. The gods of archaic man are not simply Divine Movers, or great Winders of a machine which is the Universe, and which follows its own 'natural' and necessary laws, regardless of man. Every crucial event, the recurring pattern of the seasons, the sunrise, death and childbirth, the regular flooding of a river, etc., are the immediate results of the wilful actions of the gods, actions which can be beneficial or harmful, but whose nature depends to a large extent on man's ritual functions.

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[1] In the Zhi-ma funeral ceremony of the Na-khi, the shaman sings:
"Nous allons maintenant accompagner le mort et
connaitre de nouveau le chagrin.
Nous allons danser de nouveau et terrasser les demons.
Si l'on ne sait d'ou vient la danse,
On ne doit pas en parler.
Si l'on ignore l'origine de la danse,
On ne peut pas danser."
quoted in Mircea Eliade, Aspects du Mythe, p.29.

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[1] Theodor H. Gaster, _op_._cit_., p.23.

III Greek Cosmogonical Myths

As in the mythology of any other people, for the Greeks there is no one version of what happened in the beginning, at the moment of creation. There exist several myths which account for the creation of the gods, and most of them relate a different story. However, except for a few passages in Homer and for the Orphic myths, which state that either Okeanos or Night,respectively, were the origin of all things, most other Greek and Pelasgian myths assert that in the beginning, even before the existence of the gods, there was Chaos. Let us look at three exemplary myths (the third one being a part of Hesiod's Theogony) which relate the coming of the gods into being out of Chaos, and try to see the basic patterns of thought which they reveal, insofar as the conception of creation is involved.

The Pelasgian myth relates that the first goddess to come out of Chaos was Eurynome, whose first act was one of dividing the sky from the sea, and separating them. She then grasped the North Wind, and rubbing it between her hands, metamorphosed it into the Great Serpent Ophion. Next, she was fertilized by the Serpent Ophion and taking the form of a dove, she laid the Universal egg which hatched after Ophion had coiled around it. Everything that exists tumbled out from the egg. After Ophion had annoyed her by saying that he was the real Creator, she crushed his head with her heel and banished him to the lower regions of earth. Before that she also kicked out his teeth, and from one of these, Pelasgus, the first human being sprang out from the earth in Arcaidia.[1]

The second version of the Creation myth is Olympian and it also states that Mother Earth was the first to emerge from Chaos. Having done that, she bore Uranus. He fertilized her by means of rain which he showered on her from Heaven and immediately there sprung from her vegetation, animals, and all rivers, lakes and seas.[2] Finally, we have Hesiod's account in which he begins to sound out the holy stock of the everlasting immortals[3] by telling us that first came Chaos, then Gaia, then Tartaros and lastly Eros. All the other deities that follow are either born from one of these primordial parents, or else from the love act of two of them.[4]

Like most other mythological traditions, the Greek myths of creation see the first stage in the creation of the universe as a 'coming out' of Chaos. Chaos exists before earth and sky, or even any of the gods, come into being. Unlike any of our modern interpretations of chaos as a state of disorder, or even as a 'void', the representation of Chaos to the Greek mythopoeic imagination was probably that of a bounded gap. According to Kirk and Raven, "Xaos implies primarily a region of vast size, but secondarily and implicitly its boundaries."[1] The passage of Hesiod's Theogony which describes the event of Chaos'appearance is the following one:

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[1] Robert Graves, vol.I, op.cit., p.27.

[2] Ibid., p.31.

[3] Hesiod, Theogony, trans.R.Lattimore (U.S.A.: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 105.

[4] It is interesting to note that the first two myths (which are probably earlier accounts) we have mentioned, contain the early belief that women can be fertilized either by the wind, or else by means of rain. When we come to Hesiod's account in the Theogony, we notice that he already has some reservations about this and feels that it is more or less an 'unnatural' thing. He accepts that these things happen among the gods, but he still presents it as an oddity: "Without any sweet act of love she (Gaia) produced the barren sea, Pontos, seething in his fury of waves", 132.

> ...tell me all this you Muses
> who have your homes in Olympos,
> from the beginning, and tell who was first
> to come forth among them.
> First of all there came Chaos[2]...

It is important to note here that Hesiod uses the word 'geneto' to describe the appearance of Chaos. The last line has often been translated as "First of all there was Chaos", but it really signifies, "First of all there came into being Chaos". Hesiod does not intend then, that Chaos was, in the sense of an eternal, absolute beginning. Rather it came into being from something else, whatever that might have been. At this stage of thought it was impossible for the Greeks to conceive of anything coming into being out of nothing,[3] and thus Chaos could not have been presented as existing from all times, as the absolute beginning of everything else having no other precedent. Even though its precondition was never actually expressed in Greek mythology, it was implicit in the very words used to describe the event of Chaos. For Hesiod, at least, as we saw in our quotation above, Chaos is his 'starting point' in the sense of a landmark to begin his tale, rather than an 'absolute beginning'.[1]

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[1] C.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p.28.

[2] Hesiod, op.cit., 114.

[3] H.J.Rose, op.cit., p.19.

The first stage in the creation for the Greeks is conceived of spatially: an enormous gap which however, is not conceived of as infinite, neither temporally, since it has a beginning itself, nor spatially, since it does have limits. This lack of the notion of temporal infinity also applies to the goddesses. Eurynome, mother Earth and Gaia (probably all versions of the same Earth goddess) even though they "come first", all have 'come into being' out of Chaos, i.e., they never existed from Eternity. Also absent from the Greek myths of creation is the idea of a Creator as we find in the Hebrew myths, who fashions, or creates, in the sense of giving form to an object external to him. Instead of a creation in the Hebrew sense, we have the notion of procreation, where the consequent is a direct issuing either from the goddesses' womb in the case of deities, or else from what was an original part of herself as in the Olympian myth. The absence of a Creator in the Hebrew sense from the myths of the origins of the Universe gives an altogether different significance to the mythopeic conception of the universe and of man. The world of nature was an original part of the goddess herself before she brought it to birth, and furthermore, since it was Uranus who fertilized her, nature is the result of the love act of two gods. Therefore it is only natural that the mythopoeic mind should regard the world around it as holy and sacred. Not only do the gods reveal themselves constantly _within_ nature but the divine origins of nature are conceived of as a _part_ of the deity herself. In the case of man, since the gods all have a common origin, in the sense that they have all come to be out of Mother Earth, then man too, shares this divine origin with them, having sprung out from the earth too. As Pindar puts it,

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[1] H.J.Rose, *op.cit.*,p.19.

> Single is the race, single
> of men and of gods;
> From a single mother we both draw breath.[1]

Thus we find the interesting fact that most Greek regions boasted of being the descendants of Pelasgus, originally having sprung from the soil in Arcaidia but later turning up in a number of different places. Another autochtonous (literally: sprung from the earth) ancestor is also Ducalion, from whom a number of regional inhabitants claimed to be descended.[1]

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[1] C.M.Bowra, _op.cit._, p.45.

Whether the original process of procreation is conceived of as the consequence of the love act between two gods, or as the spontaneous issuing of a goddess out of Chaos, or of man out of Earth, we see exhibited one of the mythopoeic attempts to view the universe as orderly through the method of "bringing its elements in a genealogical relationship with one another."[2] Obviously, this order is not the result of specific design on the part of a Creator God, as we see later in Plato.[3] Rather, we have either the spontaneous emergence of deities, or else the anthropomorphically conceived parent-child, sister-brother, husband-wife, etc., relationship of the gods which is the result of sheer accident.

A further sense of cosmic order is established in Greek thought by conceiving each deity as ruler of an assigned portion of the universe, whose limits should not be encroached on by another deity.[4] In the famous passage of the Iliad where Poseidon protests against Zeus' interference in his affairs, Poseidon exclaims: "For we are three brothers, born of Kronos and Rhea, Zeus and I, and Hades is the third, the lord of the dead. And in three lots are all things divided, and each took his appointed domain (or privilege, status)."[1] Here, in Poseidon's statement we have in a nutshell, a picture of the Greek mythopoeic conception of cosmic order. The universe is orderly because the relationship between the gods exhibits the order of the family, and furthermore, each god is appointed his own area, over which he presides as lord, so that no confusion or overstepping of limits occurs. Again, the original 'parting out' of the domains to each god, is not conceived of as an act of design but of blind chance: Lachesis, or the Lady of the Lots, as her name implies, decides on which portion is to go to what god, and this she does by drawing lots.[2]

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[1] W.K.C. Guthrie, In the Beginning (London: Methuen & Co., 1957), pp.21-25.

[2] Henri Frankfort et.al., op.cit., p.249.

[3] Plato, Laws 10.886-99b.

[4] For a full discussion of the notion of 'lot' or 'portion', see F.M.Cornford, op.cit., pp.12-39.

We have been dealing with the myths which postulate Chaos as being the "first to come forth" before all the other gods. There are several other creation myths, however, which also deal with other primordial sources and which have to be looked at even though evidence is scanty and scholars are not too sure about the fact that belief in them was widespread. The most important of these myths is the one which postulates that Okeanos is the source and origin of all things and we find mention of it mainly in Homer. Okeanos was generally believed to be a river encircling the earth. As in most archaic accounts, the Greeks also believed that the earth was a flat disc with the heavens above it covering it like a solid, inverted bowl. Sometimes the sky was described as made of bronze and sometimes as made of iron, but in both cases, it is always very bright.[1] The dome of the sky is seen as actually touching the earth at the horizon and if one travels far enough, one can literally reach a point where one can touch the sky.[2] Between the earth and the lower part of the sky, i.e., up to the clouds, the gap is filled by mist, or aer and in the gap beyond that is fiery aither. Below the surface of the earth, at a distance that would take a falling anvil nine days to reach, as Hesiod tells us, is Tartaros, in which region the earth has its foundation.[3] Finally, encircling the flat disc of earth, and forming its boundaries, as Homer tells us, we have the river Okeanos which flows in a circle.

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[1] _Ibid._, p.15.

[2] _Ibid._, p.22.

The first reference to Okeanos in the Iliad is in Book I, 423, where it is briefly mentioned without further description, as the place where Zeus meets the Aithiopians to feast. More important, however, for our purposes, are the three references to Okeanos which all occur in book fourteen, in connection with Zeus' deception by Hera. The passages are as follows:

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[1] Hesiod, Theogony, 726.

[2] H.J.Rose, op.cit., p.17.

[3] Theogony, 726

> xiv.201: Since I go now to the ends of the generous earth, on a visit to Okeanos, whence the gods have risen, and Tethys our mother...
>
> xiv.300: I am going to the ends of the generous earth, on a visit to Okeanos, whence the gods have risen, and Tethys our mother... the house of deep-running Okeanos.
>
> xiv.244: ... River Okeanos, whence is risen the seed of all the immortals.[1]

These are not the only references to Okeanos in Greek mythology. Aphrodite was supposed to have been born, in one version, from a union between Okeanos and Tethys. Sillus and Triballus, the greatest cheats and liars known to humanity, were born of Okeanos and Theia. In one of the labours of Herakles, the Titan Okeanos is mentioned attempting to try Herakles by frightening him while he is sailing on the sea, etc. Although in no other place except the Iliad is Okeanos mentioned as an original primordial source, he is always associated with Tethys, or Theia (probably Gaia), who, as we saw was the first Mother of all, which probably makes him one of the older gods.

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[1] All these passages follow the R. Lattimore translation.

Although the Homeric references I have used in the R. Lattimore translation do not refer to Okeanos as the begetter of all things but only of the immortals, Kirk and Raven translate passage xiv. 244 of the Iliad as follows: "...the streams of river Okeanos who is the begetter of all."[1] The Greek text goes as follows:

> ἄλλον μέν κεν εγωγε θεῶν αἰειγενεταων,
> ῥεῖα κατευνήσαιμι, καὶ ἂν ποταμοῖο ῥέεθρα
> ὠκεανοῦ, ὅς περ γένεσις πάντεσσι τέτυκται

Obviously, the term "immortals" (athanaton) does not even appear, but rather, pantessi, which is correctly interpreted by Kirk and Raven as "all things absolutely".

We are left then, with these surprising references to Okeanos as the begetter of all things surprising, since Homer hardly ever indulges in cosmogonical speculation anywhere else in the Iliad. It is possible however, that this particular belief could have been an importation from the Egyptian-Babylonian civilizations which also held that the mythological waters were the primordial source of all life.

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[1] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p.15.

IV Orphic Myth of Creation

The next body of creation myths which we have to consider is the one which has been compiled as being supposedly Orphic.[1] Although the question of a possible Orphic influence on the early Presocratics has aroused vehement controversies, there is no reason why we should not spend some time looking into the Orphic conception of creation, which does evince a great number of mythopoeic elements. It is very possible that Orphism might first have appeared in Greece as late as the fourth century B.C., and been itself influenced by the Milesian cosmologies.[2] On the other hand, a number of scholars who have held the opposite view have gone as far as to say that Orphism as a religion had fully spread by the time of Hesiod, and that most of Hesiod's Theogony is borrowed straight from the Orphic myths themselves.[3] In so far as the question of borrowing is concerned, W.K.C.Guthrie and Jane Harrison both hold, however, that Orphism was nothing but a pouring of old wine into new bottles:[1]

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[1] In the section on Orphism I shall be following the series of fragments entitled, "Orphic Fragments", compiled by Kern, which are included in W.K.C.Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion (London: Methuen and Co., 1952), pp.136-142.

[2] For this position see for example, G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., pp.46f.

[3] See for example, Pierre-Maxime Schuhl, Essai sur la Formation de la Pensée Grecque (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), pp.235ff.

> Any argument which implies that Orphism was a primitive form of religion is condemned to falsity from the outset. The Orphic showed a genius for transforming the significance of his mythological or ritual material, and sometimes saw an opportunity of preaching his religion through the medium of symbols which were in their origin of the crudest and most primitive.[2]

It is true that Orphism does not present a body of mythology which differs to any large extent, in so far as content is concerned, from what Homer and Hesiod set down. The question as to which body of mythology precedes the other is unimportant for our purposes, however. Whether Orphism was established in the fourth century B.C. or earlier, it still chose to express its religious truths largely in mythopoeic form. We shall see however, that whereas Hesiod's Theogony is mainly expository and narrative, Orphism introduces doctrines that are both quasi-metaphysical and moral.[3]

The theogony of the Rhapsodies postulates that in the beginning was Chronos. Out of Chronos, Chaos, Aither and Erebos are born.

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[1] Jane Harrison, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p.495: "The weak point of the Orphic was, of course, that he could not, would not break with either ancient ritual or ancient mythology, ...but must needs mysticize and reconcile archaic obsolete traditions."

[2] W.K.C.Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion, p.128.

[3] Ibid., p.84.

Chronos then fashions in Aither an egg, which, when it splits into two, produces Phanes, the First-born (Protogonos), who is also Eros, Dionysos and Metis. "At the birth of Phanes the misty gulf below and the windless Aither were rent."[1] Phanes is a hermaphrodite, both "Female and Father the mighty god Erikepaios."[2] Phanes is also referred to as the First Creator since he is Father of all gods and of men of the Golden Age, who belong to a past era. Phanes then proceeds to create the Moon, mountains and imperishable mansions of the gods; in fact, he creates a world. Being Female as well as Male Creator, Phanes brings forth a daughter, Night, who comes next in order of supremacy in ruling the Universe. Besides power, he also bestows on her the gift of Prophecy.[3]

We shall pass over the next sequence in this cosmogony,because much of the material is very similar to Hesiod's Theogony. One dominant change appears, however, and that is the continual allusions to Night as the bearer of supreme power. It is she who, among other things, counsels Zeus to usurp the throne from Kronos and it is to her that Zeus goes for advice as to how to establish his rule among the immortals (Fr.164). I shall now reproduce the remaining fragments that deal with Zeus'work of Creation (which is the second creation following Phanes') after his defeat of Kronos.

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[1] Fragment 72.

[2] Fragment 80.

[3] Fragment 103.

165. Proklos and others. (Zeus speaks to Night). How may I have all things one and each one separate?

Surround all things with the ineffable Aither, and in the midst set the heaven, and in the midst the boundless earth, in the midst the sea, and in the midst all the constellations with which the heaven is crowned.

166. Proklos. (Night to Zeus). But when thou shalt stretch a strong bond about all things, fitting a golden chain from the Aither.

167. Proklos. Thus then engulfing the might of Erikepaios, the Firstborn, he (Zeus) held the body of all things in the hollow of his own belly; and he mingled with his own limbs the power and strength of the god. Therefore together with him all things in Zeus were created anew, the shining height of the broad Aither and the sky, the seat of the unharvested sea and the noble earth, great Ocean and the lowest depths beneath the earth, and rivers and the boundless sea and all else, all immortal and blessed gods and goddesses, all that was then in being and all that was to come to pass, all was there, and mingled like streams in the belly of Zeus.

168. Porphyrios and others. Hymn to Zeus, which begins: Zeus became first, Zeus of the bright lightning last. Zeus is head, Zeus middle, and from Zeus all things have their being. Zeus became male, Zeus was an immortal maiden. Zeus is foundation of earth and starry heaven. Zeus is king and Zeus himself first Father of all.

In the first part of the myth, Phanes-Eros is First Creator and paradoxically, also Firstborn (Protogonos). To recall briefly two points we made in connection with Greek myths of Creation, we saw that, first, the Greeks could not conceive of either a Creator, or a state of being, to have existed as an eternal precondition before the actual beginnings of the universe. Secondly, Creation for the Greeks, unlike the Hebrew myth, is conceived of in terms of procreation, an act of childbirth, rather than an act of fashioning. When we come to this ambiguous account of the birth, nature and creation of Phanes, we see both the introduction of a concept of creation which is foreign to Hesiod's Theogony, coupled with a traditional account that conceives of creation as the result of a series of intermarriages between the gods. Unlike the Pelasgian, Olympic and Hesiodic myths where there is always ~~either~~ an initial Goddess, both Chronos and Phanes are two ostensibly male principles, or deities. In the case of Chronos (and here we might have a possible carrying over of the Universal egg from the Pelasgian myth), since he is a male deity, he does not lay the egg, as Eurynome does, but fashions it, i.e., we are dealing here with the accomplishing of a creation by a male god. With Phanes, the concepts of a male creator and of female procreation are reconciled by making him a hermaphrodite. As Father, he creates a world and as Mother, he starts the long series of gods that are to follow, by procreating Night.

The second act of creation occurs with the swallowing of Phanes by Zeus, who is about to start a new creation. Although the strangeness of the act of swallowing has been emphasized very strongly,[1] it is one that occurs very often in archaic ritual and more than once in Greek mythology: one most prominent example occurs in the Hesiodic Theogony, where Kronos, under the pretext that it was Zeus himself, swallows a stone. In the Dionysian ritual too, one held communion with the god by eating the sacrificial bull. The act of eating, or swallowing something in order to partake of its power, to become one with it, and to imbibe all of its qualities, is a very familiar one to the mythopoeic mind. However, the act of swallowing of Zeus has here acquired more sophisticated connotations than the primitive notion of swallowing allows. By swallowing Phanes, Zeus becomes one with him, in the sense that he takes on the nature of Creator that belonged originally to Phanes. But this is not all that there is to it, simply because before Zeus swallows Phanes, he asks Night a question which reveals not only a "technical" concern as to how he should go about creating anew, but also the metaphysical query of how he can have 'all things one and each one separate'. To this question, Night gives two answers, and the actual swallowing of Zeus contains the third. Fragments 165 and 166 contain Night's answer to Zeus. Night answers Zeus by showing him that all things 'can be one' in two ways: First of all by surrounding the universe with the 'ineffable Aither' and secondly, by placing the separate items, heaven, earth, sea and constellation, which make up the universe all in one position: "in the midst".

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[1] W.K.C.Guthrie, Orpheus & Greek Religion, pp.104-107.

The importance of Zeus' question to Night is that it introduces for the first time in Greek thought, along with the notion of a male First Creator, the notion of design. We saw earlier that in the context of Greek mythopoeic thought, the order of the universe was the result of sheer accident, as in the genealogical relations of the gods, and pure chance, as in the division of the universe into assigned portions to each god. Now, before proceeding to create a universe, Zeus is concerned with the question as to how he can have order in a universe which is composed of a plurality, i.e., how can an orderly universe be one universe and at the same time be made up of separate items? That is to say, Zeus is already planning to create a universe which will be a cosmic One, or Whole, and this plan is made explicit in his question to Night. Night answers, it seems to me, by giving Zeus two solutions: a philosophical one and a mythopoeic one. The Universe is to be One because it is to be surrounded by one thing, the Aither; it is to be a Cosmic Whole, because it is to be grounded in the Center. Thus unity is achieved by grounding a plurality in one common position, the midst, and by surrounding the plurality with one common element, the Aither, which creates a 'strong bond about all things'. Finally, the third answer to Zeus' own question, he answers himself by swallowing Phanes: "all that was then in being and all that was to come to pass, all was there, mingled like streams in the belly of Zeus." (Fragment 167). The separate All have become the One in so far as they all have this in common, that they are all an actual part of the one creator, Zeus.

The Orphic myth of creation then, introduces explicitly the metaphysical problem of the One and the All and proposes to resolve it in terms which are both mythical and philosophical. As we saw earlier, in our discussion of space in mythopoeic expression, the symbolism of the Center plays a most important role in the conception of creation and it is taken over unquestioned in the Orphic myth. In the same way, the pantheistic idea of all things being actually contained within the body of the Creator Zeus, does not appear to depart from the mythological frame of thought, since we find this idea often in Greek myth as mentioned above.

The introduction of a philosophical point of view is made primarily both in the question that Zeus asks and in the attempt to conceive of unity by having one element, Aither, surround all things. The idea of the one and the many does find its expression in mythopoeic thought, primarily in the symbolism of the Center, but it is an idea that exists as latent within mythopoeic expression, and is never made explicit in such abstract terms. Furthermore, although Okeanos was also conceived of as surrounding the Universe, Okeanos was thought of anthropomorphically, and associated, in Greek mythology with numerous acts in which he participated. Now, in the context of the Orphic myths, although Aither is referred to frequently as 'divine', as having been born, and as having been the receptacle for the egg out of which Phanes emerged, Aither is not personnified at all, and is often called the Aither, just like any other object or thing. Clearly then, Aither is not presented as a god, but as an impersonal, abstract, practically intangible element which cannot even be described in words, since it is called 'ineffable'.

PART TWO

I Note on the Sources

Ever since Diels published his famous Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, it has become clear that the nature of any interpretation of the Presocratics, and in particular of the Milesians, will largely be decided on by which of the fragments are consulted, or by which of them are considered to be authentic. One of the main problems in deciding whether the fragments really represent the ideas of the Milesians themselves rather than of their interpreters, has of course been the fact that a great number of the fragments happen to be either reports made by Aristotle, or else by later disciples of the Peripatetic school, in both of which cases the terminology is so flagrantly Aristotelian that one finds it very difficult to believe that the Milesians could have expressed themselves in this way. Furthermore, concerning Aristotle's references to the Milesians, Aristotle brings in their cosmogonical theories mainly in order to point out what he believes to be their fallacies, so that, as a result, his comments are more enlightening for an appreciation of his own philosophy, rather than for an understanding of the Milesians themselves. It has been established, on the other hand, that as a commentator on the Presocratics in general, Simplicius' paraphrase of Theophrastus seems to be much more precise and faithful to Presocratic doctrines,[1] so that on the whole, we shall be relying heavily on Simplicius, rather than on Aristotle, except in parts where Aristotle seems to do justice to the theories of his predecessors.[1]

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[1] Although Theophrastus himself draws heavily from Aristotle, he still preserves an independent judgement and proceeds to quote frequently from the Presocratics, frequently using their own expressions rather than Peripatetic terminology.

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[1] Further comments as to the reliability of the sources will be brought in the course of our discussion.

II Thales

> Greek philosophy seems to begin with an absurd notion, with the proposition that water is the primal origin and the womb of all things. Is it really necessary for us to take serious notice of this proposition? It is, and for three reasons. First because it tells something about the primal origin of all things; second because it does so in language devoid of image or fable, and finally because contained in it, if only embryonically, is the thought, "all things are one."[1]

The event of Thales and his famous proposition concerning water has aroused the imagination of most philosophic commentators and in particular of Nietzsche, whose words, quoted above, are the least fantastic of all his comments on the early Presocratics. Most modern scholars today have rejected Nietzsche's thesis concerning the Presocratics as being unlikely and much too romantic. Nietzsche's vision of Thales as an intuitive mystic seems to be more wishful thinking than actual fact. Accordingly, another portrait of Thales has been presented to us, most notably by John Burnet and W.K.C. Guthrie, wherein we see Thales exposed as the first true scientist, delivering, in his statements about water, the first scientific hypothesis. This latter interpretation of Thales is accepted as being more probable than Nietzsche's and much more coherent account of Thales' view of the universe. A closer look at the picture that the latter scholars present to us, however, seems to reveal as much imagination and wishful thinking as Nietzsche's does. Since Thales' contribution concerning the _arche_ is so scanty that it can be summarised practically in three lines, most of what we know about him today depends to a large extent on the interpretation given to Thales' statements by the vast amount of critics that have written on him. It is therefore most important that an attempt be made to dispel a number of misunderstandings and far-fetched theories that exist on Thales' account, since it is probable (unless new fragments be discovered) that no further original contribution to an understanding of his _arche_ will be made.

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[1] F.Nietzsche, Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, (Chicago: Henry Reguery, 1962) pp.38 & 39.

Along with Burnet's intention of presenting the early Milesians as the first scientists, is his attempt to dismiss the belief that any earlier mythological or religious traditions could have influenced their thought. In order to prove the latter, he gives us three arguments which we shall spend some time on. In the first place, Burnet tells us that historically, since the Greeks were only able to establish their settlements on the coast of Asia Minor after the coming of the Dorians, there was no traditional cultural or religious background in Ionia at all.[1] "Ionia proper was a country without a past. That explains the secular character of the earliest Ionian philosophy."[1] Secondly, even though we find the early Presocratics using the word 'theos,' or 'god', either to refer to the arche, or else to the world, they do not use it to mean a god who is the object of worship, but rather what the divine epithets of 'ageless' and 'deathless' stand for. Thus, if we are tempted to look for ancient religious remnants in the fragments, the word 'god' should not mislead us into believing that the Ionians meant it religiously; it has a completely 'secular' meaning in this context.[2] Finally, we cannot derive science from mythology because,

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[1] John Burnet, _op.cit._, p.13.

> while primitive religion regards the heavenly bodies and the heavens themselves as divine, and therefore of a wholly different nature from anything on this earth, the Ionians from the very first set their faces against any such distinction, though it must have been perfectly familiar to them from popular beliefs.[3]

The first argument as to the history of Asia Minor, is obviously shaky, since the Achaeans established their colonies in Asia Minor after the coming of the Dorians, around 1100 B.C. The Achaian migration to Asia Minor occurred shortly after 1100 B.C.[4] so that we have a period of about three to four hundred years elapsing between the first Greek settlement in Asia Minor and the event of the early Milesians. Surely, it seems to me, that this left ample time for at least *some* traditional Greek influence to exert itself in Ionia as witnessed in particular in Homer's *Iliad*, written by an Ionian who was probably more Greek than the Greeks themselves. Furthermore, due to its geographical location and the fact that the Ionians had developed an intensive trade market, Ionia was visited and inhabited by a multitude of different races and nationalities, viz., Carians, Cretans, and Phoenicians, among many others.[1] And it is highly probable that all of these different people introduced a great number of their religious customs and beliefs into Ionian culture. Burnet's argument for the total independence of the origins of Greek thought is as destructive as it is fallacious. It has connotations, as has been pointed out, which makes the Greek race appear, as it were, 'predestined' in an almost miraculous way, to start something without any precedent whatsoever,

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[1] Ibid., p.14.

[2] Ibid., p.14.

[3] Ibid., pp.14 and 15.

[4] See H.D.F. Kitto, The Greeks, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1951), pp.12-28.

> Du même coup, l'homme grec se trouve, dans cette perspective, élevé au dessus de tous les autres peuples, predestiné; en lui le *logos* s'est fait chair. "S'il a inventé la philosophie, dit encore Burnet, c'est par ses qualites d'intelligence exceptionnelles: l'esprit d'observation joint a la puissance du raisonnement." Et, par'dela la philosophie grecque, cette superiorité quasi-providentielle se transmet a toute la pensée occidentale, issue de l'hellenisme.[2]

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[1] P.M.Schuhl, *op.cit.*, pp.165ff.

[2] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *op.cit.*, p.286.

As to the use of the word "theos" by the Milesians, it is interesting to note that they found it necessary to use it at all, even though it might not have been meant religiously. Although Burnet does not proceed to tell us what he means by a non-religious use of the word 'god', I presume that he intends to mean that it was used non-anthropomorphically, in which case he has a valid point. The arche of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes is definitely presented in non-anthropomorphic terms, even though it is attributed epithets of 'immortality' and 'indestructibility'. However, these are still terms borrowed from the mythopoeic tradition that preceded the Milesians. The terms 'immortal and indestructible' are not coined by the early Presocratics but borrowed straight from Homer and Hesiod, in which case we can say that Burnet himself has given us at least one example, wherein the Milesians depend on the religious tradition that preceded them. Furthermore, Thales, as far as we can gather from the fragments, never specifies, with regards to his statement "All things are full of gods", that he simply means that all things are full of 'immortality and indestructibility' rather than full of gods.

Lastly, the statement Burnet makes as to the distinction that the primitive mentality makes between the divine heavens and the profane earth is neither true for the mythopoeic mind, nor does its negation apply to the Milesians themselves. As we have seen, in discussing the importance of sacred space and the sanctified cosmos in mythopoeic thought, a Cosmos is a sanctified *One*, a whole which includes the heavenly bodies the gods and the earth itself. The realm of the profane derives sacredness from its divine origins, a sacredness which is precarious and which man constantly has to renew, but which nevertheless is a *reality*. Archaic man regards the Cosmos in which he lives as composing one whole, wherein the gods and the human beings have a very intimate relation, and this relation is intensified by seeing the very life of the community, nature and the heavenly bodies, in complete harmony. In the Greek myths of creation, we saw how the fact that the universe has divine origins influenced the conception of the divinity of nature, and moreover, in Orphism, how the universe was pictured as an actual part of the Creator himself. In the *Oresteia* (written about the middle of the fifth century), where we are presented with the idea of a fragmented cosmos, the heavenly bodies displaying a harmonious whole while the polis is blighted and disorganized, the fact is very clearly presented to us as an *abnormality*, a state of chaos, due among other things, to the sins of the royal family. Under normal circumstances, both the earth, the polis and the heavenly bodies should have been a harmonious One, each reflecting the order and sactity of the other. By taking this for granted, the Ionians could not "have set their faces against" the distinction that Burnet mentions as existing in primitive religion, because the distinction is foreign to it.

The information we have from Aristotle, concerning Thales' cosmogonical theories can be reduced to three statements:

1. The earth floats on water.
2. Water is the material cause of all things.
3. All things are full of gods, The magnet is alive for it has the power of moving iron.[1]

The second statement is obviously in Aristotelian terminology, since Thales had not yet reached the point where he could distinguish the four kinds of causality. What exactly Thales could have meant by saying that water is the _arche_ of all things has to be seen in terms of what possible connotations of the word 'arche' were accessible to Thales.

The term 'arche' as used in the context of Greek literature has both spatial and temporal connotations. In Aristotle's famous discussion of the term, the first meaning he attributes to the word is a spatial one, in the sense of the starting-point of a line or road. Thus, a line has an _arche_ or beginning, "as that part of a thing from which one would start first."[2] The word is also used to refer to a foundation, or that from which, as an immanent part, a thing first comes to be, e.g., as the keel of a ship or the foundation of a house. Aristotle includes this usage in the definition of the term, and Plato refers to the keel of a ship as the arché.[1]

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[1] John Burnet, _op.cit._, pp.46 and 47.

[2] Aristotle, _Met_.1013a; Richard Mckeon, ed., _The Basic Works of Aristotle_ (New York: Random House, 1941), p.752.

In the Iliad, the word primarily has a temporal connotation, so that it means the first event in a series. Thus, the crime of Paris is the arche of the quarrel, or the origin of the fight, while the first moment in the series of events leading to Patroclus'death is kakou arche, or bad beginning.[2] The verb form, archo, means to lead, and as it is used in the Iliad, to lead men to battle, i.e., meaning to march ahead of them:

"The Trojans came down on them in a pack and Hektor led them."[3] The word used for 'led' is erche. Hence we get the signification, 'to rule' or 'to go first' as also used in the Iliad.

According to Kirk and Raven, Thales could possibly have meant either that the world originated from water, or else that water is the "hidden constituent of all things."[4] The latter interpretation seems to be improbable since Thales is not reported to have said that all things are full of water, but of gods.

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[1] Plato, Laws 803a3, op.cit.,p.1734.

[2] Charles H.Kahn, Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p.236n.

[3] Homer, The Iliad xv, 306.

[4] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p.93.

Aristotle reports that some of the ancient philosophers "say that it (soul) is intermingled in the universe, for which reason, perhaps, Thales also thought that all things are full of gods."[1] If Thales believed that the world floated on water like a disc, it is possible that he could have intended water to be the *arche* in two ways. First, in the sense of an immanent foundation, as the keel of a ship is related to the rest, on which the world rested. As such, water is the *arche* in the sense of "what comes first" before everything else arises. If Thales was influenced by Near Eastern cosmologies which also regarded the earth as floating on the primeval waters (in Egypt, *Nun*), he could have also shared their belief that the world *originated* from these waters. Water supports the earth as a foundation supports what rests on it. In the case of a ship (and Thales himself is reported to have used the ship metaphor to refer to the earth),[2] the foundation, or keel, is an intrinsic part of the ship itself, yet they are clearly distinguished. First by giving them two different names (in Greek: *naupegias* and *kataballomenos*), and second because the ship is not made up solely of the keel, i.e., the keel is not what essentially constitutes the ship. In the same way, we can gather that Thales' water is an intrinsic part of the world, in the sense that, as immanent foundation, it is what holds the earth, yet in no place are we told that he believed that all things contained in nature are made up of water. Neither do we find the signification "essential constituent", in any of the connotations of the word 'arche'. That is why the suggestion that Thales was the first individual who "attempted to explain the variety of nature as the modifications of something in nature",[1] is simply nothing but a highly imaginative interpretation of Thales' supposed beliefs. If we could be sure that Thales' water was really the H_2O of nature, this statement would make complete sense. However, as it is, we cannot be sure that Thales might not have been referring either to Homer's Okeanos, or else to the Near Eastern primeval waters. Furthermore, this statement seems to assume that Thales' conception of nature is akin to our twentieth century one although we are told that Thales believed all things to be "full of gods", including the magnet, which is presumably a part of 'nature'.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p.94.

[2] By Seneca, *ibid.*, p.92.

The main difficulty that arises in trying to give a coherent account of what Thales believed his arche to be, is that we are not given any indication of the relation between water and all that presumably arose out of it. That is why Thales' cosmogonical statements sound more oracular than those of his successors and seem to be propounded as objects of belief rather than 'scientific hypotheses'.[1] In so far as Thales believed nature to be full of gods, he was still deeply entrenched in the mythopoeic tradition that preceded him and that viewed the world around it as divine and as equally the domain of god and man. Even his quasi-scientific 'explanation' of earthquakes as caused by the movement of water under the earth[2] is a reflection of the Greek mythopoeic belief that earthquakes were caused by Poseidon, "mighty Earthshaker", whose domain was the sea.

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[1] W.K.C.Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol.I. (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), p.68.

Thales and his two successors all exhibit the common attempt to view the unity of the world by ascribing a common arche as its ultimate source of origin. However, the only Milesian of the three who sees explicitly the arche as immanent in the world, in the sense of it being in some way the actual constituent of all things, is Anaximenes. Although this might be the result of lack of information, nowhere are we told that Thales believed his water to be immanent in the world except in one passage, where Aristotle suggests it as a possibility: "... but Thales, the founder of this type of philosophy, says it is water (and therefore declared that the earth is on water), perhaps taking this supposition from seeing

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[1] cf. W.K.C. Guthrie, ibid., p.67ff

[2] Seneca Qu. Nat.III, 14: "For he (Thales) said that the world is held up by water and rides like a ship, and when it is said to 'quake' it is actually rocking because of the water's movement." G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p.92.

the nurture of all things to be moist, and ... taking the supposition both from this and from the seeds of all things having a moist nature, water being the natural principle of moist things."[1]

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[1] Aristotle, Met.A3, 98366, *ibid.*, p.87. Underlining mine.

III Anaximander

With Anaximander the problems of interpreting the fragments become more involved primarily because the reports on his writings are more numerous than those on Thales'. Furthermore, we often have conflicting interpretations of his supposed writings[1] and as is most often the case with Aristotle's comments on his predecessors, a number of references are made to doctrines which sound as though they were Anaximandrian, but of which we cannot be sure since Aristotle does not mention him directly by name. Whatever may be said about most of the sources however, it has been established by a large number of modern scholars that at least three of the fragments are correct reports on Anaximandrian doctrines concerning the arche. Furthermore, at least one of the sources, namely Simplicius' commentary of Theophrastus, contains a direct quotation from Anaximander's book. The three passages are reproduced below:

I. Simplicius Phys. 24,13: "Of those who say that it is one, moving and infinite, Anaximander, son of Praxiades, a Milesian, the successor and pupil of Thales, said that the principle and element of existing things was the apeiron (indefinite, or infinite), being the first to introduce this name of the material principle. He says that it is neither water nor any of the so-called elements, but some other apeiron nature, from which come into being all the heavens and the worlds in them. And the source of coming-to-be for existing things is that into which destruction, too, happens according to necessity; for they pay penalty and retribution to

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[1] Anaximander is credited with having written several books, the most important being entitled, "On Nature".

each other for their injustice according to the assessment of Time, as he describes it in these rather poetical terms.[1]

II. Hippolytus; This (the infinite) is everlasting (aidion) and ageless (agero), and it encompasses (periehein) all the worlds.[2]

III. Aristotle *Phys*. 203b 11; *Nor is it without reason that they all make it a principle or source.* We cannot say that the infinite has no effect, and *the only effectiveness which we can ascribe to it is that of a principle.* Everything is either a source or derived from a source. But there cannot be a source of the infinite or limitless, for that would be a limit of it. Further, as it is a beginning, it is both uncreatable and indestructible. For there must be a point at which what has come to be reaches completion, and also a termination of all passing away. That is why, as we say, there is no principle of this, but it is this which is held to be the principle of other things, and *to encompass all and to steer all, as those assert who do not recognize, alongside the infinite, other causes*, such as Mind or Friendship. *Further they identify it with the Divine, for it is 'deathless' and 'imperishable' as Anaximander says*, with the majority of the physicists.[3]

Other passages relevant to our discussion will be brought in, to support the ones quoted above.

Simplicius comments that Anaximander was the first philosopher to use the term *arche*.[4] This could either mean that Anaximander was the originator of the word 'arche' itself, in the sense that he coined it, or else that he was the first to use the term in connection with the originative substance, which only means that Thales, before him, had not used it in connection with his water. Burnet still offers a third possibility when he translates the first line of fragment I as follows:

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[1] Kirk and Raven, *op.cit.*,pp.105-107; the passage underlined is supposed to be a direct quotation.

[2] Paul Seligman, *The Apeiron of Anaximander* (London: Athlone Press, 1962), p.20.

[3] Richard McKeon, ed., *op.cit.*, p.259. The passages underlined are ~~presented as~~ presumed to refer to Anaximander.

[4] See Fragment I.

> ... Anaximander of Miletos, son of Praxiades, a fellow-citizen and associate of Thales, said that the material cause and first element of things was the Infinite, he being the first to introduce this name of the material cause.[1]

According to Burnet, Anaximander is credited as being the first to call the arche (Simplicius using the Peripatetic meaning, "material principle" here) the Infinite, so that the innovation is in the word 'apeiron', rather than 'arche'.[2]

We can immediately discard the first possibility, i.e., that Anaximander coined the word 'arche', because it is used frequently in the *Iliad*, as we have shown in our discussion of the term.[3] The second possibility, i.e., that Anaximander first used the word in connection with the originative substance, is more plausible, although, as Kirk and Raven point out, Simplicius had already used the word arche in his discussion on Thales without noting that it was foreign to Thales' vocabulary.[4]

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[1] Burnet, *op.cit.*, p.52.

[2] *Ibid.*, 53ff.

[3] See pp. 56 & 57 above.

[4] Kirk and Raven, *op.cit.*, p.108

Burnet's interpretation probably makes most sense; Simplicius was using the word 'arche' indiscriminately, and probably wrongly, as the Aristotelian 'first principle', to apply to the three Milesians, so that in the context of his remarks on Anaximander, it appears that he was referring to the word 'apeiron' as an innovation, rather than suddenly attributing to Anaximander a word that he had already used in the context of Thales.[1] Again, Anaximander's innovation in using the word 'apeiron', is clearly solely in the context of philosophical cosmogony, i.e., it is not an original coinage, since, like the word 'arche', it is found in numerous instances in the Iliad.

It has generally been taken for granted that the word _apeiron_ is a compound word with an _a_-prefix, derived or formed from the noun _peirar_, or _peras_, which signifies in Greek, limit, so that apeiron is the negative form of the latter, i.e., meaning 'without limit'. C. H. Kahn, however, points out in a lengthy analysis of the word,[2] that although _limitless_, or _boundless_, seem to be a correct translation of the word, "it does not really answer to the usage of the term."[3] He points out two usages of the word, which do not seem primarily to imply notions of limitlessness. Thus, the word 'apeiron', is used to describe circles and rings, as well as nets or articles of clothing 'in which one is entangled past escape' according to the Greek. Rather than being the noun 'peiras' that is negated by the a-prefix, Kahn points out, it is the verb 'peiro' which, along with a number of prepositions and adverbs formed from the same root 'per', indicates a movement in a forward direction. The adverb form 'peran', is always connected with what lies 'in front', or 'ahead', and Kahn gives as example the Homeric line:

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[1] Cf. Paul Seligman, _op.cit._, 26-28 for the opposite viewpoint. C.H.Kahn also seems to accept Seligman's view, _op.cit._, pp.29-32

[2] C.H.Kahn, _op.cit._, pp.231-233.

[3] _Ibid._, p.231.

> They who came from Doulichion and the sacred Echinai,
> islands, where men live across the water from Elis...[1]

The Greek equivalent of "across" is here peren.

In the Homeric passages where the word peirath, i.e., limits, is used to apply to 'earth and sea', the epithet is always accompanied by the idea of someone moving towards the 'limits' as an end.

> I care not; not if you stray apart to the undermost
> limits of earth and sea...[2]

Although earth and sea are usually attributed epithets of boundlessness and limitlessness, the notion of limit is brought in when a deity, (capable of reaching the limits of what for human beings is the limitless), in the example above, Hera is concerned.

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[1] Iliad, BkII, 625f.

[2] Ibid., Bk VII, 487.

It is this basic verbal idea which is negated in apeiron, apeiros, exactly as the synonymous aperantos is formed from the verbal root, peraino. The true meaning of apeiros is therefore "what cannot be passed over or traversed, from end to end". A circle is apeiron because it has no beginning as well as no end, while a net is also 'apeiron', because, as Kahn points out, there is no escape from it, i.e., it is impenetrable. From this notion of the limitless as that whose end cannot be reached, and as always implying the idea of motion, or someone going through, the word "apeiros" is also used to refer in Homer to what is very big, or innumerable. It is interesting to note that in Aristotle's analysis of infinity, the word 'apeiron' is defined primarily as "what is incapable of being gone through."[1]

We saw that the term 'arche' had both spatial and temporal connotations, and that it had four significations, two of which are spatial, namely, 'beginning point' and 'immanent foundation'. It becomes difficult to think of the apeiron in terms of any of these spatial significations, considering the fact that Anaximander did not identify his apeiron with any specific 'stuff' or element.

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[1] Aristotle, Phys. 204^a 2-7; Richard McKeon, ed., op.cit., p.260.

Thus, the *apeiron* cannot be the *arche* in the sense of a specific spatial *point* at which something starts, because then it would be capable of being located. Thales' water is located as underneath the earth and we can therefore conjecture that it was at this point that the cosmogonical process originated. However, to give the apeiron a specific spatial location is also to limit it spatially so that it ceases to be spatially infinite, if this is what Anaximander meant by the infinity of the *apeiron*. One of the major interpretations of the *apeiron* as *spatially* infinite is given by Burnet who considers the apeiron to be "an endless mass, which is not any one of the opposites we know, stretching out without limit on every side of the world we live in."[1] Further on, he qualifies his statement and says that the apeiron is the "spatially infinite". This interpretation however has been refuted as unlikely since, as Cornford first pointed out, to have a concept of an infinite mass is to presuppose a concept of infinite space and this only makes its appearance after the fifth century B.C.[2]

But even if Burnet's conception of the *apeiron* as spatially infinite is rejected, we still cannot interpret the apeiron spatially as being a starting point without considering it as some kind of material reality. Now if there is something that we can be certain of in the context of Anaximander's cosmogony, it is the fact that the apeiron is not identified with anything material. In fact, this is what makes him stand out from the other Milesians and this is the way he is primarily presented to us in all the ancient reports of his writings and theories. The first thing we know about Anaximander is that his arche is neither water, nor air, nor an element but something else. In fact this is the only point on which all the sources are in agreement. To say, as Burnet does, that the apeiron is an "endless mass" is more of an interesting suggestion than a faithful report from the fragments themselves.

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[1] Burnet, *op.cit.*, p.58.

[2] Paul Seligman, *op.cit.*, p.33. See also G.S.Kirk & J.E.Raven *op.cit.*, p.109.

We cannot consider the apeiron as an arche in the sense of immanent foundation either and this for two reasons. In the first place, as Kirk and Raven point out,[1] any physically immanent foundation would have to be identified with one of the elements or anything capable of being identified in nature and clearly this is refuted in Fragment I. Secondly, we are told specifically in the same sources that the things which originate

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[1] Kirk and Raven, op.cit., 115f.

from the _apeiron_ return _to it_ when they are destroyed. Another passage (Ps.-Plutarch, Strom.2) describes the original cosmogonical process as follows:

> He says that that which is productive from the eternal of hot and cold was separated off at the coming-to-be of this world, and that a kind of sphere of flame from this was formed round the air surrounding the earth, like bark round a tree. When this was broken off and shut off in certain circles, the sun and the moon and the stars were formed.[1]

Here the originating process from the _apeiron_ is described as a _separating off_. In this sense, Anaximander's thought exhibits a dualism as Seligman correctly points out, in that although it makes One reality the source and ultimate end of all things, it draws a sharp distinction between that One and all individual existing things which have originated from it.[2]

It seems then, that we cannot regard the _apeiron_ as the _arche_ in any of its spatial connotations. The temporal signification of the term 'arche', in the sense of 'first event' or what happens first, is more meaningful and appropriate in the context of Anaximander's thought. After all, since the _apeiron_ is that from which everything that exists has its origin, it therefore must have had some kind of existence before everything else, it truly must have preceded temporally all else that exists. Paul Seligman interprets this pre-existence of the apeiron as an eternal pre-existence, i.e., he interprets the *apeiron*, as primarily signifying 'the eternal'.[1] This again appears as highly unlikely since the term 'agenetou', which Seligman chooses as pointing to the notion of eternity, does not appear in any of the reports on Anaximander's philosophy. Neither, on the other hand, does the term come up in a philosophical context before Parmenides, who is supposed to have used it in connection with his absolute being. This does not mean however, as Seligman himself realizes, that "the term did not lie beyond Anaximander's semantic range"[2]; it was in use before the sixth century but nowhere does it imply *eternity* in any sense. The term 'agenetou' meant 'uncreated' but not in an absolute sense, i.e., of not having had an origin at all, but rather of not having been 'brought to birth', in the specific sense of issuing from a womb. Thus Chaos would be *agenetos* even though it undergoes the process of 'genesis', in the sense that it comes to be although not as the result of the love act between two divine parents. In the same way, Eurynome is '*agenete*' because she springs out of Chaos and is not truly born *from* Chaos. If Anaximander really did conceive of his *apeiron* as eternal, it would have been a tremendous innovation since, as we saw earlier, this concept was not present in mythopoeic thought at all. We do have references to the *apeiron*'s divinity and immortality as we see in Fragments II and III, and if Anaximander had indeed used the notion of 'eternity' in connection with his *apeiron* I see no reason why it would not have been mentioned, in particular by Simplicius who was probably very familiar with this idea. Our argument is further strengthened by the fact that as we saw earlier, the term 'apeiron' did not hold any temporal connotations to suggest infinity at all.

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[1] Kirk and Raven, _op.cit._, p.131.

[2] Paul Seligman, _op.cit._, p.113.

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[1] *Ibid.*, 58ff.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp.59 and 60.

The paradoxical nature of Anaximander's *apeiron* resides basically in the fact that while the connotations of the word *apeiron* give every indication that his *arche* might have been a vast material something, yet we are told specifically by all the sources that it cannot be identified with any material reality that we know of in this world. It has been suggested that,

> Greek thinkers were very slow to apprehend that anything could exist without spatial extension.... Plato seems to have been the first Greek to have consciously thought that anything could exist otherwise than in space, and he was followed in this respect by Aristotle.[1]

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[1] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, *op.cit.*, pp.249 and 250.

This seems to apply to all the Presocratics and in fact to the mythological tradition that preceded them. However, in the case of Anaximander, we have to admit that he came very close to describing his apeiron as non-spatial. He seems to have done it mainly negatively (if this indeed was his intention), i.e., the apeiron is not positively described as non-spatial but the Simplicius fragment explicitly says that the apeiron is neither water, nor an element, i.e., not a spatial reality, but some other apeiron nature. So, although we cannot positively say that Anaximander conceived of his apeiron as extra-spatial, we have a definite suggestion that the nature of the apeiron is other than any material reality.

Now we saw earlier, in our discussion of the mythopoeic conception of space, that (to use my own sentence) "any spatial reality is by definition a reality that implies the possibility of transition and passage from one point to another". Furthermore, we also saw, in our discussion of the meaning of the term 'apeiron', that Aristotle defines it primarily as that 'which is incapable of being gone through', or, from the Homeric context, that whose limit cannot be reached. The Homeric references to the earth and the sea as being 'apeiros', i.e., so vast that no human could reach their limits, are not references to non-spatial realities. Although sea and earth are apeiros for human beings, they are totally spatial realities for the gods who _can_ reach their limits. In the context of the Iliad, therefore, what cannot be gone through is not necessarily what is non-spatial. However, seeing the close connection that the conception of movement has with the conception of space in mythopoeic thought, there is the possibility that Anaximander consciously used the notion of _apeiron_ to mean what could not be gone through, i.e., what was non-spatial. If space defined itself primarily to the archaic mind as that which is _peran_, then for Anaximander, what is _apeiron_ could have been meant as that which is non-spatial.

Since most of this discussion on the extra-spatial character of the _apeiron_ is more of a conjecture, seeing the scanty nature of the material,it would be good not to dwell on this point too vehemently. It is highly possible that Anaximander might not have thought of the _arche_ as extra-spatial but, as Burnet suggests, as a material reality. However, this latter view is open to a great deal of objections on the evidence of the fragments themselves, while our suggestion as to the extra-spatiality of the _apeiron_ seems to be more consistent with the Anaximandrian cosmological system, as will be shown. The non-spatial nature of the apeiron we pointed out as being suggested negatively in the context of the Simplicius fragment. This does not mean, however, that Anaximander's _apeiron_ is nothing but a negative reality. In fact, as we intend to show, it is the only positive force in his whole scheme of things. Rather than spending a great deal of wasted time, as has been done by most interpreters, on trying to guess what exactly the _nature_ of the _apeiron_ is, or, as Aristotle does, what kind of substance it should have been, the only way to understand any significance it might have had is to look at it primarily in terms of the _relation_ it exhibits with other existents. As Seligman points out correctly,

> The apeiron is essentially one and ultimate, and therefore cannot be analysed into simpler constituent notions. Consequently it cannot be known in and by itself but only in terms of its function and that must be described in terms of the idea's distinction from, and relation to, the many things that make up our world.[1]

Looked at solely in itself, the apeiron can only be described negatively. However, in the general cosmogonical scheme, it has positive reality which is defined as follows.

In the first place, it is that reality from which everything has come into being, i.e., everything which is _peran_, or limited. In the Simplicius fragment, existing things, i.e., everything that is not apeiron, are designated by the term ta onta. Things however, do not come out directly from the apeiron. As we saw earlier, in the pseudo-Plutarch fragment, what are first separated out from the apeiron are the elements of cold and hot, and out of these the earth, sun, moon and stars are formed. The hot and the cold are separated out from the apeiron in what appears to be a spontaneous fashion; in the center of the cold and the hot, the earth emerges as a condensation, surrounded by a circle of flame, or fire, 'like a bark around a tree'. From this spherical flame, the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies, appear through a process of 'breaking off and shutting off' at certain areas of the sphere.[1] As far as we are concerned, the importance of this interesting theory of the original cosmogonical process and formation of the universe is that it sets the primary distance between apeiron itself, and all that issues indirectly from it. In physical terms then, the earth and the other heavenly bodies are not direct issuings from the apeiron, but only indirect ones, since they are the actual products of hot and cold. Consequently, the function of the apeiron is relegated primarily to a cosmogonical arche, and only "mediately to the arche of creatures."[2]

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[1] Paul Seligman, _op_._cit_., p.114.

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[1] For an interesting interpretation of this theory as influenced by ancient Greek stovepipes, see, Robert S. Brumbaugh, The Philosophers of Greece (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), pp. 21ff.

[2] Paul Seligman, op. cit., p. 73.

While all existing things come from the apeiron indirectly, we are told however, that their return to the _apeiron_, at the moment of their destruction, is more immediate. That is to say, that the world we live in and the other heavenly bodies will at a certain time be destroyed and return from whence they have come: into the _apeiron_. Strangely enough this process of destruction and return to the apeiron is viewed as happening according to some kind of necessity. We can only understand this very strange and fatalistic doctrine in terms of what follows it in the Simplicius fragment: "for they (i.e., what has originated from the apeiron) pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of Time..."

Things, _ta onta_, originate from the apeiron and are in turn destroyed. This process of origin and destruction is, we are told, necessary and what the phrase quoted above does, is to give the _reason_ why this is so, i.e., why things _have_ to be destroyed.

It has been established by most scholars that the things which pay retribution and penalty are viewed as related to each other and not to the _apeiron_. The _adikia_ doctrine therefore is strictly limited to what has originated from the apeiron, and does not include the apeiron itself. The adikia or injustice that is committed by things is committed against each other (allelois) and it is to each other that things pay retribution, or the tisis. It does not mean as was once thought by Diels, Nietzsche and others, that the very fact that things derive their existence from the apeiron makes them inevitably guilty, or that "man, finite as he is, is also inevitably guilty, and that death is the 'wages of sin'..."[1]. The two clauses of the Simplicius fragment make the distinction very clearly: the first clause describes the relation between existing things and the apeiron, and the second clause that between existing things themselves. The terminology used in the second clause is borrowed from the law courts: tisis being the retribution, or compensation that the injured party receives from the wrong-doer who has committed the injustice, or adikia.[2] This whole process of mutual wrong-doing and retribution is undergone by the things which have originated from the apeiron: the hot and the cold, and their product, the world we live in and the heavenly bodies. The taxis, or assessment, as Kirk and Raven point out, was the punishment which the judge decided on for the wrong-doer, and in the context of the Anaximandrian doctrine, it seems appropriate then, to see time as "what controls the time-limit for payment."[1] This conception of things as happening in a law-court with time presiding as the judge was already common some time before Anaximander and given expression by Solon in a number of his writings. Here again we have the notion of injustice, or _adikia_ as immanent in the social order coming up very often with consequent punishment.[2]

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[1] Richard Kroner, Speculation in Pre-Christian Philosophy (England: Longman's, Green & Co., 1957), p.83.

[2] Werner Jaeger, Paideia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p.159.

The _adikia_ metaphor seen in the context of the original cosmogonical process, can be applied primarily to the action of the hot and the cold which results in the formation of the world. As we saw, the earth is formed as a condensation, i.e., seen in Anaximandrian terms, as an 'encroachment' of the hot on the cold. The hot oversteps its limits, thus committing _adikia_ against the cold, for which action it will eventually have to pay retribution. That the process of 'drying out' is still continuing is mentioned by Aristotle (_Meteorologica_ 353b10) as being the belief of some of the ancient philosophers, and it could very well be a reference to Anaximander:

> They (i.e., the ancient philosophers) believe that the sea is still drying up and becoming less, and that in the end a time will come when it is all dried up.[3]

This 'destructive action' of the hot might eventually have to be paid for in two ways. Either the hot will be punished by "destroying its own sources of nourishment",[1] and hence dying out, or else, in a future world there will be a reversal in the cosmological process and the cold will be the aggressor. "But in each case the whole world will of necessity have been destroyed and return to its source."[2] In the context of natural processes within this world, it has been suggested that the Anaximandrian adikia might have been applied to the recurring patterns of the seasons, day and night, etc. Thus, "the injustice of summer has to be made good within the roughly equal period of winter, that of night during the period of day, and so on."[3]

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[1] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, _op.cit._, p.120.

[2] Werner Jaeger, _op.cit._, p.144.

[3] Paul Seligman, _op.cit._, p.74.

It is easy to see then why it is that everything that has its origin from the apeiron necessarily has to be destroyed. Since ta onta, or existing things, are all under the law of adikia, this very law requires retribution or punishment in the form of destruction. In the case of natural phenomena within this world, the adikia process is seen in terms of mutual encroachment and compensation in the recurrent movement of the seasons, etc. However, in terms of the cosmogonical process as such, the mutual adikia committed by the hot and the cold results in the total destruction of either the one or the other, and consequently of the whole world. The tisis paid by the party committing the adikia, or the overstepping of its limits, is its own destruction and the whole process is seen in terms of a cycle. Thus, Pseudo-Plutarch comments: "He (Anaximander) declared that destruction, and much earlier coming-to-be happen from time immemorial, as they are all recurring in cycles."[1]

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[1] Ibid., p.74.

[2] Ibid., p.74.

[3] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p.120.

Since everything that originates from the apeiron necessarily has to return to the apeiron, we can consequently see how it is that the apeiron 'governs and encompasses all things'. The most plausible explanation is that the apeiron can be said to govern ta onta in that, as their ultimate source, it "bestows existence upon them."[2] It is difficult to see how the apeiron, could "bestow existence" on things, since it does not exhibit any purposeful design, nor is it described in anthropomorphic terms. Existence could be 'bestowed', in the sense of an 'imparting' of it to things.[3] But again, this could not possibly be understood in any wilful sense, but rather as an automatic kind of thing. The hot and the cold, are separated off, from the apeiron not due to any specific act on the part of the apeiron, but rather automatically, so that if we did not know that in a future cosmogony the whole process would start all over again, we would attribute the separation of hot and cold to chance rather than to necessity. That is to say, the "separating off" of the hot and the cold in the original cosmogony is described as a spontaneous phenomenon, not as the result of any specific decision on the part of the apeiron, happening as it were by chance. Viewed in the general cosmological process of the successive, cyclical existence of worlds, however, the event of the hot and the cold, since we know that it will occur again cyclically, appears as necessary. Rather than 'bestowing' existence on ta onta, the apeiron should be seen more as the passive reality from which everything derives its existence. Thus, we should see the 'governing' power of the apeiron, not in any anthropomorphic purposeful sense, but rather as that power upon which all existing things ultimately depend for their existence. Of a 'governing' power, in the sense of a direct intervention in the realm of ta onta, the apeiron evinces no signs.

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[1] Paul Seligman, op.cit., p.

[2] Ibid., p.121; cf. G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p.115.

[3] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., pp.126f.

The metaphor of "encompassing" is particularly appropriate to Anaximander's description of the apeiron, since as we saw earlier, the word 'apeiros' was used to describe nets, or articles of clothings through which one could not escape.

In this sense, if the apeiron is that to which everything that exists necessarily returns, then the apeiron truly encompasses all things like a net. The fatalistic nature of Anaximander's doctrine reflects itself in the very metaphors he uses to describe his universe: ta onta cannot escape the apeiron, since they ultimately have to return to it.

Although we have seen why it is that everything that exists is necessarily destroyed, due to the fact that ta onta or existing things are ruled by adikia, we are given no reason explicitly why things necessarily have to return to the apeiron. I would suggest that the return of things to the apeiron can only be understood if we look at Anaximander's cosmogonical theory in terms of what preceded it in the mythopoeic distinction between the sacred and the profane.

The apeiron we saw as described in terms that make it removed from the reign of adikia or injustice that involves all existing things. Whereas the apeiron is divine, immortal and indestructible, things are necessarily destroyed, because they are profane and unjust in their very process of existing. While the mythopoeic mind conceives of a distinction between the realm of the profane and that of the divine, the distinction is not one, as we saw, that is either necessary or continuous. Insofar as early man believes that life is a series of 'leases' whose sacredness has to be continuously renewed by his own ritualistic actions, his view of the cosmos is, if we could put it this way, optimistic and pragmatic. The reality and meaningfulness of phenomena can constantly be renewed by a return to their sacred origins and space and time can be continually grounded in their source of being, in their divine beginnings. The return of phenomena to their sacred origins, however, although regarded as necessary for the renewal of their meaningfulness and reality, is not seen in terms of an automatic recurrence, that happens independently of man. Man is an active participant in the life of the cosmos, insofar as he takes it upon himself, through his ritualistic behaviour, and his rememberance of myth, to make this return come about. Now, in the case of Anaximander, we have, in essence, the same view of things. The origins of life and of the cosmos are sacred and it is necessary that all that issues from the divine apeiron return to its immortal origins. However, this process is no more seen in terms of human action: it has become a necessity removed from man to the realm of what is automatic, what happens through a 'natural' process, irrespective of man's interference. Furthermore, the presence of adikia, or injustice in the midst of all existing things, is not a state of chaos that is temporary and that man himself, by following the correct ritual procedures, can remedy. It has become the norm, what is necessary, in the sense of what is irremediable, what is an irremediable quality of all existing things, whose only logical and existential conclusion can be one of destruction. Truly, we have here depicted one of the most pessimistic and fatalistic doctrines in philosophy. According to Jaeger, Anaximander was "formulating a moral, not a physical law of nature. There is a deeply religious meaning in his conception that natural phenomena are governed by a moral standard. It is not a compendious description of events, but a justification of the nature of the universe: he shows creation to be a cosmos 'writ large' - namely a community of things under law."[1] Unlike what Jaeger would have us believe, Anaximander is not presenting such a beautiful and harmonious picture of the cosmos at all. Creation is not a community of things under law but a state of profane injustice, ruled by adikia. The cosmos presents a break, a fantastic contrast between the apeiron, removed, divine and immortal, and created things, encroaching upon one another, unjust, and ultimately all to be destroyed. The return of things to the apeiron, furthermore is not conceived either as some kind of reward, or as a cessation of the reign of injustice, but simply as a cyclical return which is followed once again by a new 'creation', a new reign of injustice.

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[1] Werner Jaeger, Paideia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p.160.

Whereas divinity is conceived of in terms of gods who participate actively in the affairs of man and his cosmos in mythopoeic thought, Anaximander's _apeiron_ is removed from its 'creation' by being both extra-spatial and by evincing no signs of 'concern', as it were for the ramage of injustice that exists in what it has given existence to. In the same way, i.e., in the same way that the apeiron is removed from any intervention in the unjust affairs of the cosmos, man too has become solely a spectator, rather than a participant and actor. Anaximander's theory of the universe, gives an explanation, in theoretical form, of natural and cosmic processes that proceed according to necessity and by the same token, man has become a spectator who understands what is going on in the cosmos, i.e., understands that things are going on according to necessity, and therefore that there is nothing he can do to change the course of events. Things have sacred origins and into these origins they have to return, but no more due to the ritualistic intervention of man, since "things happen according to necessity". By removing both the gods and man from his cosmos, as active participants and actors, Anaximander resorts to the fatalistic doctrine of seeing the life of the cosmos as occuring in cycles according to necessity. Things, _ta onta_, no more derive value from their sacred origins, neither mythically, by the fact that they are created by a specific god, nor ritualistically, by the fact that man himself can act in such a way as to ground them in their sacred origins.

IV Anaximenes

The most reliable reports on Anaximenes' arche seem to be the following:

I. Theophrastus ap.Simplicium Phys. 24,26: Anaximenes son of Eurystratus,a companion of Anaximander, also says that the underlying nature is one and infinite like him, but not undefined as Anaximander said, but definite, for he identifies it as air; and it differs in its substantial nature by rarity and density. Being made finer it becomes fire, being made thicker it becomes wind, then cloud, then (when thickened still more) water, then earth, then stones; and the rest come into being from these. He, too, makes motion eternal, and says that change, also, bomes about through it.[1]

II. Hippolytus Ref.1,71,1: Anaximenes... said that infinite air was the principle, from which the things that are becoming, and that are, and that shall be, and gods and things divine, all come into being, and the rest from its products. The form of air is of this kind: whenever it is most equable it is invisible to sight, but is revealed by the cold and the hot and the damp and by movement. It is always in motion: for things that change do not change unless there be movement. Through becoming denser or finer it has different appearances; for when it is dissolved into what is finer it becomes fire, while winds, again, are air that is becoming condensed, and cloud is produced from air by felting. When it is condensed still more, water is produced; with a further degree of condensation earth is produced, and when condensed as far as possible, stones. The result is that the most influential components of generation are opposites, hot and cold.[2]

III. Cicero N.D. 1,10,26: Afterwards, Anaximenes determined that air is a god, and that it comes into being, and is measureless and infinite and always in motion; as though either formless air could be a god... or mortality did not attend upon everything that has come into being.[3]

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[1] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p.144.

[2] Ibid., pp.144, 145.

[3] Ibid., p.150.

IV. Augustinus C.D. viii,2: He (Anaximander) left Anaximenes as his disciple and successor, who attributed all the causes of things to infinite air, and did not deny that there were gods, or pass them over in silence; yet he believed not that air was made by them, but that they arose from air.[1]

V. Aetius, 1, 3, 4: As our soul, he says, being air holds us together and controls us, so does wind (or breath) and air enclose the whole world. (Air and wind are synonymous here).[2]

While one can say that Anaximander's arche is the ultimate source and end of all things, removed from finite existence and the world of becoming, Anaximenes' theory concerning the origin of existing things offers a striking contrast to Anaximander's. Indeed, one is led to believe that Anaximenes' thought must have been consciously formulated as a reaction to the fatalistic Anaximander, and since the former was a younger contemporary of the latter,[3] it is very possible that such was the case. Although Anaximenes has always appeared as the less exciting of the three Milesians, the reports we have on him give us a fuller and more coherent account of his philosophy than those dealing with his predecessors. Unlike the oracular nature of Thales' beliefs which are left unexplained, or Anaximander's difficult metaphorical expressions, Anaximenes, we are told, wrote in simple, economic Ionian,[4] and his cosmogonical views evince the same economy.

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[1] Ibid., p.150.

[2] Ibid., p.158. The sentence underlined might be a direct quotation from Anaximenes with heavy paraphrasing.

[3] Anaximenes was probably twenty-four years younger than his immediate predecessor.

[4] See Diogenes Laertius, II, 3.

Anaximenes' air was probably not solely the thick, dense mist referred to in Homer, but, as is mentioned in various instances,[1] ~~is~~ an invisible substance which is also pneuma, or breath. It is highly possible that Anaximenes conceived of his air in some ways as we do today, i.e., as that invisible stuff which surrounds us and which is everywhere.[2] He believed, for example, that air when condensed forms mist or vapour, and refers to breath and wind as also air.

According to one source,[3] Anaximenes believed the earth to have originated from a "felting of the air", or a condensation in one of its parts. Like Thales, he believed the earth to be flat, and accordingly, to ride on air. The stars and other heavenly bodies are produced from the earth, "through the exhalations arising from it; when the exhalation is rarified fire comes into being, and from fire raised on high the stars are composed."[4] Again, as with Anaximander, no reason or act of design is ascribed to the original condensation in the air that produces the earth. Since Anaximenes did not believe in the cyclical recurrence of the cosmogonical process, the starting-point of the cosmogony is therefore viewed as a spontaneous, chance phenomenon, in accordance with the Greek mythopoeic tradition.[1]

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[1] See in particular, Fragment II, above.

[2] W.K.C.Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol.I, p. 126; also G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., p. 146.

[3] Ps. Plutarch, Strom. 3; ibid., p.151.

[4] Hippolytus Ref.1,7,5; ibid., p.152.

In the same way that condensation and rarefaction of the air respectively produce earth and stars, the production of natural phenomena within the world is also viewed as the result of this process. Thus, we are told that Anaximenes believed that air can be rarefied to become fire, condensed to become wind, and by the same processes, turn itself into earth and stones. This theory has given rise to the interpretation that Anaximenes had grasped the substance-attribute distinction, seeing air as immanent in all things, whose appearance changes, but not its essential being, or nature.[2] This is doubtful however, as we shall see later. We have one indication as to how Anaximenes probably conceived of rarefaction and condensation in Plutarch, where we are told that, "he says that matter which is compressed and condensed is cold, while that which is fine and _relaxed_ (using this very word) is hot."[3] Now we are told in the first three fragments that air is in constant movement, and by Theophrastus, that the movement of air causes change. It seems therefore, that the degree of rapidity with which the air moves causes it to transform itself into various states of matter. When the air is "relaxed", or moving slowly, rarefaction occurs, the air being "made finer" and thus becoming fire. On the other hand, when the air moves quickly, we obviously have wind, and a faster motion causes cloud, water, etc., all explained as "condensation".[1]

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[1] cf. _ibid._, p. 152.

[2] See for this interpretation, W.K.C. Guthrie, _A History of Greek Philosophy_, vol. I., pp.115f. Also John Burnet, _op.cit._, p.74.

[3] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, _op.cit._, p. 148.

Anaximenes' theory of rarefaction and condensation as used to explain the origin of phenomena has both quasi-scientific elements as well as mythopoeic ones. Scientifically, Anaximenes' contribution is that for the first time, change and plurality in the world are explained as alterations in the quantity and speed of his arche, unlike Thales' water whose relation to the world was never made explicit, or Anaximander's apeiron that plays no role in the affairs of the world. As Guthrie points out, "With Anaximenes apparent differences of kind or quality are for the first time reduced to a common origin in differences of quantity."[2] Air is not solely taken as a cosmogonical source of origin, but plays an active part in the world of becoming as that which causes change. It is in his explanation of this change, i.e., of the transformation of air into the various components of the world that Anaximenes reveals the scientifically unsophisticated aspect of his theory of change. For indeed, it appears that the transformations that air undergoes are viewed by Anaximenes as though they were some kind of immediate metamorphoses.

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[1] It is interesting to note that Anaximenes' theory of the relation of speed to temperature is exactly the reverse of our modern theory concerning the movement of molecules, which states that the speed of molecules is increased with the rise of an object's temperature.

[2] W.K.C.Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, vol.I, p.126; see also John Burnet, op.cit., p.73f.

The divinity of Anaximenes' air is asserted by Aristotle[1] and Aetius[2], while the other sources report that the gods themselves arose from air.[3] In both cases however, air is attributed the divine power of changing itself almost immediately into the most unexpected things. It is highly improbable that Anaximenes could have derived this conclusion from any empirical observation. In the case of air transforming itself into wind through condensation, quasi-scientifically speaking, the theory is plausible, since wind surrounds us in the atmosphere in the same way that air does, and both are equally invisible. However, in the cases wherein air becomes material, the change, although explained as the results of condensation or rarefaction, is an almost "miraculous" one and must be attributed to the divine capabilities of air to metamorphose itself into different forms. That is why, it is practically impossible to believe that Anaximenes must have regarded air as present in objects, the way substance underlies its attributes. Air is immanent in the world of phenomena as that which surrounds everything under its invisible form, like the Orphic *aither*. It is also that whose movement causes everything to originate from it. Once air *becomes* earth or stone, however, it becomes a totally new thing: it does not basically remain air with the attributes of solidity and colour, but has metamorphosed itself into a new phenomenon altogether.

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[1] See Fragment III, in the section on Anaximander.

[2] G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven, op.cit., pp.150-151.

[3] Kirk and Raven suggest that this belief emphasizes the true divinity of the air, in opposition to the gods, who, as Xenophanes and Heraclitus were later to assert, were usually represented anthropomorphically with attributes not befitting divinity. This suggestion is interesting though we find no explicit statement in the sources that Anaximenes held such a belief. See ibid., p. 150.

What exactly Anaximenes was trying to point out by drawing the similarity between air and soul[1] is doubtful. The notion of soul "holding together" the body seems to appear for the first time in Stoicism and has no early parallel.[2] However, the simile made between breath and soul is a common one in Homer and Anaximenes might have been familiar with it. Anaximenes is reported to have used the example of breath to explain his theory of rarefaction and condensation, and the passage from Plutarch[1] leads one to conclude that he identified breath in some way with air. It is possible then, that as he considered air to be present in the atmosphere around us, enfolding everything and "controlling all things", Anaximenes might have held that the soul is some form of air too. We can see this psychic theory as an attempt to express in terms consistent with his theory of air as the arche, the early belief in the kinship that exists between man and the world of phenomena surrounding him. Air is not solely that divine power which, as the source of all things, unifies the world of plurality, but also that which equally exists in man, thus providing him with the assurance that he is also a part of the world's unity.

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[1] Kirk and Raven suggest four possibilities: i. man and the world are similar; ii. air operates in all kinds of things; iii. the world is alive; iv. air is the life principle of all things. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161. It is possible that i and iii were unconscious presuppositions of Anaximenes, while ii and iv are definitely suggested by his theory of air.

[2] Ibid., p. 160.

Anaximenes' view of the cosmos is one wherein the universe is presented as an ordered unity, unlike the sharply divided world of Anaximander. The divine arche unifies the world by being its common source of existence but furthermore, as the atmospheric air, it surrounds all things, including man, making all things share a common world. Rather than seeing all of becoming as a basic _adikia_, Anaximenes explains the process of change as the harmonious metamorphoses of a divine _arche_. We almost have a return to Thales' view of the world as "full of gods" - Anaximenes likewise regards the world as surrounded by and inhabited by divinity.

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[1] Ibid., p.148: "... man releases both warmth and cold from his mouth; for the breath is chilled by being compressed and condensed by the lips, but when the mouth is loosened the breath escapes and becomes warm through its rarity."

Conclusion

If the fragments relating to the thought of the early Ionians had happened to present to us a full, detailed and complete account not only of the *arche* itself but of its relation to the world that originates from it, the task of interpreting the fragments would have been greatly simplified. As it is, however, the difficulties of interpreting the fragments reside mainly in the fact that a number of the reasons for the beliefs of the Ionians are not defended explicitly, but rather presupposed (either by the commentators themselves, or by our three philosophers), so that the task of the interpreter becomes mainly one of bringing these presuppositions out into the open, in such a way that they can be shown to be consistent with the explicit doctrines of the Ionians themselves. This we have tried to do in our study of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes. While, for example, Anaximenes' theory of rarefaction and condensation appears to be a perfectly adequate and full explanation of the processes of change that his *arche* undergoes in order to produce from itself the different material realities that make up our world, we are given no explicit reasons why it is that he, as well as the other two Milesians, took it for granted that their *arche* had to be divine. In the same way, while the original cosmogonical process is explained in detail by both Anaximander and Anaximenes in fully 'natural' and physical terms,[1] with no reliance upon an 'intervention' of the gods, they do not explain exactly why they conceive of such a process as coming into being almost spontaneously, with no Creator-god either conceiving it, or causing it to come into being; all three thinkers seem to take this assumption for granted. Furthermore, as we have already seen,[2] although the destruction of _ta onta_ is accounted for explicitly by Anaximander, we are not told why it is that all things must necessarily return to the _apeiron_ after their destruction. All of these unexplained beliefs (again, either consciously entertained and simply not reported in the fragments, or unconsciously assumed by Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes), as I have tried to suggest within the body of this study, can only be understood in terms of the mythopoeic conception of creation and origin that preceded the early Milesians, especially in the distinction made between the sacred and the profane. That is to say, the undefended beliefs mentioned above were probably taken over either questioned or unquestioned from the body of mythopoeic thought that existed prior to the Milesians.

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[1] See our discussion on pp.75ff and 89-92.

[2] See our discussion on pp. 83-86.

To view the contribution to thought of the Milesians solely as a re-statement of earlier mythopoeic notions, as has been done by Cornford for instance, is to disregard Anaximander's complete departure from the mythopoeic tradition in his viewing of the cosmos as essentially profane and ruled by adikia. On the other hand, to interpret Milesian thought as a complete innovation within the history of ideas, as does Burnet, provides no explanation for why the Milesians took for granted, for example, the notion that a true origin must be divine. Furthermore, if Anaximenes' air is to be considered solely as the natural phenomenon that we regard it as today, then all the passages that relate to air's divinity and to its capability for assuming the most unlikely forms have to be completely discarded in order to allow Anaximenes' theory concerning air the scientific status that Burnet claims for it.

As we have already mentioned in our introduction, to accept the strict approach either of Cornford or of Burnet in interpreting the fragments would force us to delete a number of passages as inconsistent with the interpretation of the Milesians as either true scientists or as simply repetitors in secular garb of mythological ideas. The only approach to the Milesians that will do full justice to their philosophical speculation is the phenomenological one which we have used, looking at them not in terms of a preconceived notion of what their beliefs should be, but in terms of the complex picture of their thought which the fragments present to us. And this complex picture, I would suggest, intermingles both ancient mythopoeic notions as well as innovations insofar as their view of origin is concerned. The advantages of a phenomenological approach as opposed, for instance, to Cornford's method which traces back to their earlier sources specific ideas or conceptions which he finds in the fragments, is that dissimilarities with earlier mythological expression are not overlooked totally. That is to say, while the phenomenological approach tries to bring into relief the similarities between early Milesian and mythopoeic conceptions, this is not done at the expense of dissimilarities that also clearly exist within the fragments. Neither, on the other hand, is the value of the Milesians as innovators of quasi-scientific thought stressed solely, with a complete disregard for any possible carry-over of ideas from mythopoeic thought.

By giving as full an account as possible of some of the main features of the conception of origin in mythopoeic thought in general and of the Orphic and Greek myths in particular before proceeding to examine the thought of the Milesians, both similarities and divergences with the tradition that preceded them are equally presented to the reader. Thus, the risk of overlooking divergences between mythopoeic expression and Milesian thought is diminished, and in the same way an excessive emphasis on the novelty of their thought is avoided. We are thereby making it clear that the relation between the Milesians and the mythopoeic tradition that precedes them cannot be stated as simply as it has been done by Cornford and Burnet. The Milesians are neither simple repetitors nor simple revolutionaries. They present to us truly a great innovation insofar as both a number of their ideas as well as the expression of these ideas are concerned, while at the same time we cannot help but see their similarities with mythopoeic thought insofar as the basic pattern of their conception of origin and arche is concerned. In the same way that a full injustice to an adequate understanding of Descartes' thought would be committed should we look at him solely as the father of modern philosophy or solely as a product of scholasticism, the Milesians cannot be regarded solely as complete innovators or only as mythopoeic viewers of the universe.

There is not evidence to permit us to talk of any causal connection between myth and Milesian thought, in either of two relevant senses of the word cause. We cannot claim that the Milesians, being familiar with the body of contemporary myth, simply tried to draw out in rational and abstract terms the meanings of what they were familiar with nor that they were equally familiar with but disagreed with the whole tenor and validity of mythopoeic thought and consciously tried to replace it with abstract concepts. As far as the evidence goes, no explicit dissention or agreement with earlier notions is made before Xenophanes. The most that we can prove is a temporal connection along with the phenomenological similarities that both myth and Milesian thought evince: the Milesians were familiar, on the basis of the evidence of even the few fragments remaining, with mythopoeic thought and moved ahead from this point, sometimes in new rational terms, and sometimes using the terms or making the same assumptions as myth.

In total agreement with the tradition that had preceded them, the Milesians believed the world to have originated from a sacred and divine reality. Their truly original contribution, however, to this essential mythopoeic conception of the meaningfulness and divinity of the universe surrounding them was that this divine *arche* was no more conceived of in totally anthropomorphic terms. Even though Thales' water might have been the primordial mythological waters from whence issue all existing things, we are not told anywhere that his water is a god. In the same way, although Anaximenes' air is attributed the divine powers of practically metamorphosing itself into various forms of material reality, the process is conceived of in terms of motion rather than of wilful action. As for Anaximander's *arche*, we have described a divine reality with a degree of abstraction unknown to any mythical expression.

On the other hand, as W.K.C. Guthrie has pointed out, by viewing the original cosmogonical act as a practically spontaneous event, an 'issuing out' of the divine arche rather than a wilful act of creation, the three Milesians were probably taking for granted a belief which was firmly established in the mythopoeic Greek conception of the creation of the gods and the universe.[1] As we saw in our study of the Greek myths of creation,[2] the notion of a Creator-god with a plan or design for the creation of a universe independent of him was foreign to Greek mentality and first makes its appearance in Orphism. The order and meaningfulness of the universe, then, for Thales and Anaximenes, as for mythopoeic thought, is not the result of mind or of wilful intent by a Creator, but is rather understood as being derived from the fact that the universe has a divine origin. In the case of Anaximander, the belief that the world has divine origins is also taken over unquestioned, though it does not follow from this that the universe itself exhibits divinity and harmony. For Anaximenes as well as for Thales, not only does the universe derive divinity from its sacred origins, but furthermore, as for the mythopoeic belief, it is totally inhabited and surrounded by this divinity. Thales expresses this belief in his famous statement that all things are full of gods, while Anaximenes conceives of his divine air as in some way immanent in all things. Anaximenes too, expresses the sense of affinity that early man feels with the universe surrounding him when he describes soul as some form of breath or air.

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[1] W.K.C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. I, pp. 142ff.

[2] See our discussion on pp. 29-38.

With Anaximander's view of the early cosmogonical process as an overstepping of limits or an encroachment of the hot upon the cold,[1] we might have an example of an actual dissention on Anaximander's part from the earlier Greek mythopoeic view. As we saw in our discussion of early Greek creation myths,[2] the original 'ordering' of the universe was seen in terms of a drawing of lots, wherein the gods were each appointed a 'domain' whose limits were not to be overstepped in terms of jurisdiction. Anaximander views the original creation of the world as antithetical to the notion of 'limitation', and also explains natural processes within this world as a constant overstepping of limits. Unless we see Anaximander's theory of adikia as a negation of the earlier view of an ordered universe, most of its significance is lost. Furthermore, it becomes practically impossible to give his metaphorical explanation of natural processes as basically unjust, any rational explanation that is satisfactory.

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[1] See above pp. 79ff.

[2] See our discussion on pp.34f.

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