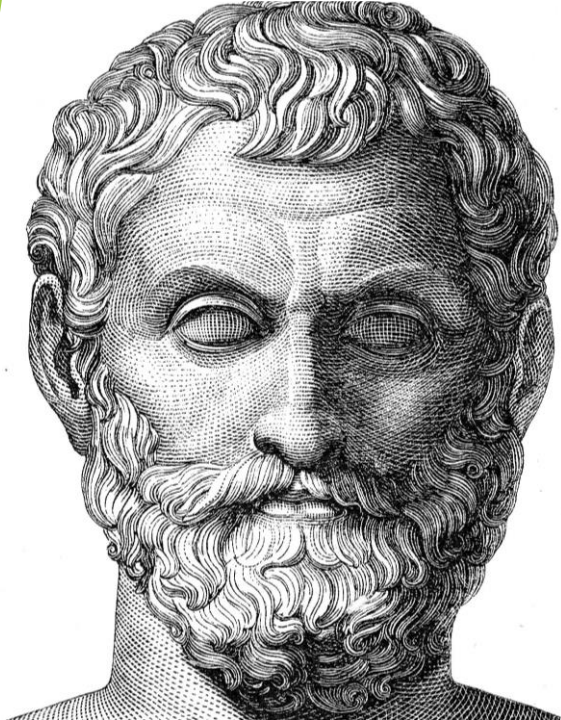


THE PRESOCRATICS: THALES AND THE MILESIANS



Where/when did this begin?

Our topic is mostly *western philosophy*-- the beginning of western philosophy is associated with Thales of Miletus (b. c.625 BCE).



Historical Context

Over 2 mya to about 3000 BCE - The Stone Age

3000 BCE- around 1100 BCE- the Bronze Age

Greek Late Bronze (1500 BCE-1100 BCE): Trojan War/the Heroic Age

-the Trojan War is the subject of the *Iliad*

1100 BCE-800 BCE: The Greek Dark Age

776 BCE- Olympic Games

750 BCE - 700 BCE: the Homeric poems are recorded

-about the same time- life/work of Hesiod

Thales born- 625 BCE

Trial of Socrates- 399 BCE

The Greek Epic Poets

According to tradition, Homer wrote, among other things, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*-- although scholars aren't sure about this, or even if "Homer" is a single person.

Hesiod wrote, among other things, a *Theogony*- an account of the origins of the gods and, by extension, all things, including the natural world.

The Poets' Justification

- ▶ Hesiod- *Theogony* 114: “Tell me these things, Muses, who dwell on Olympus ...”
- ▶ Homer- *Illiad* 2.484: “Tell me now Muses, who have dwellings in Olympus / for you are goddesses and present and know everything, while we hear only rumor and we know nothing ...”
- ▶ Homer is asking for divine inspiration to know about events which happened hundreds of years earlier.



Gustave Moreau: *Hesiod and the Muse* (1891)



Thales and the Milesians

Miletus

Thales, and his followers are from Miletus in Ionia (present day Turkey).

Founded around 1100 BCE: trading center/ manufacturing. Known for woolen goods- out on the frontier of Greek influence.

Was there a possible Iranian/Babylonian/Indian influence on the early western philosophers? Probably. However, we are going to put this issue to the side as it ultimately of more historical than philosophical interest.

Justification for The Natural Philosophers

Argument and evidence

Empirical observation-- that is, relying on *direct experience* of information received *through the senses*.

Sources for the Presocratics

We don't have complete writings for most of the Presocratics. Instead we only have quotations other writers made of their works (i.e. fragments).

Thales didn't write anything that we know of, Anaximander wrote one book-- only a sentence survives; Anaximenes wrote one book.

An aerial photograph of the ocean with deep blue and green waves, showing the texture of the water's surface. The image is partially obscured by a white diagonal shape on the right side of the slide.

Thales

- ▶ Aristotle tells us that the natural philosophers looking for a fundamental stuff/principle (an *arche*)
- ▶ For Thales this first principle was *water*—which means either that everything is *fundamentally* water, and/or that everything *comes from* water.

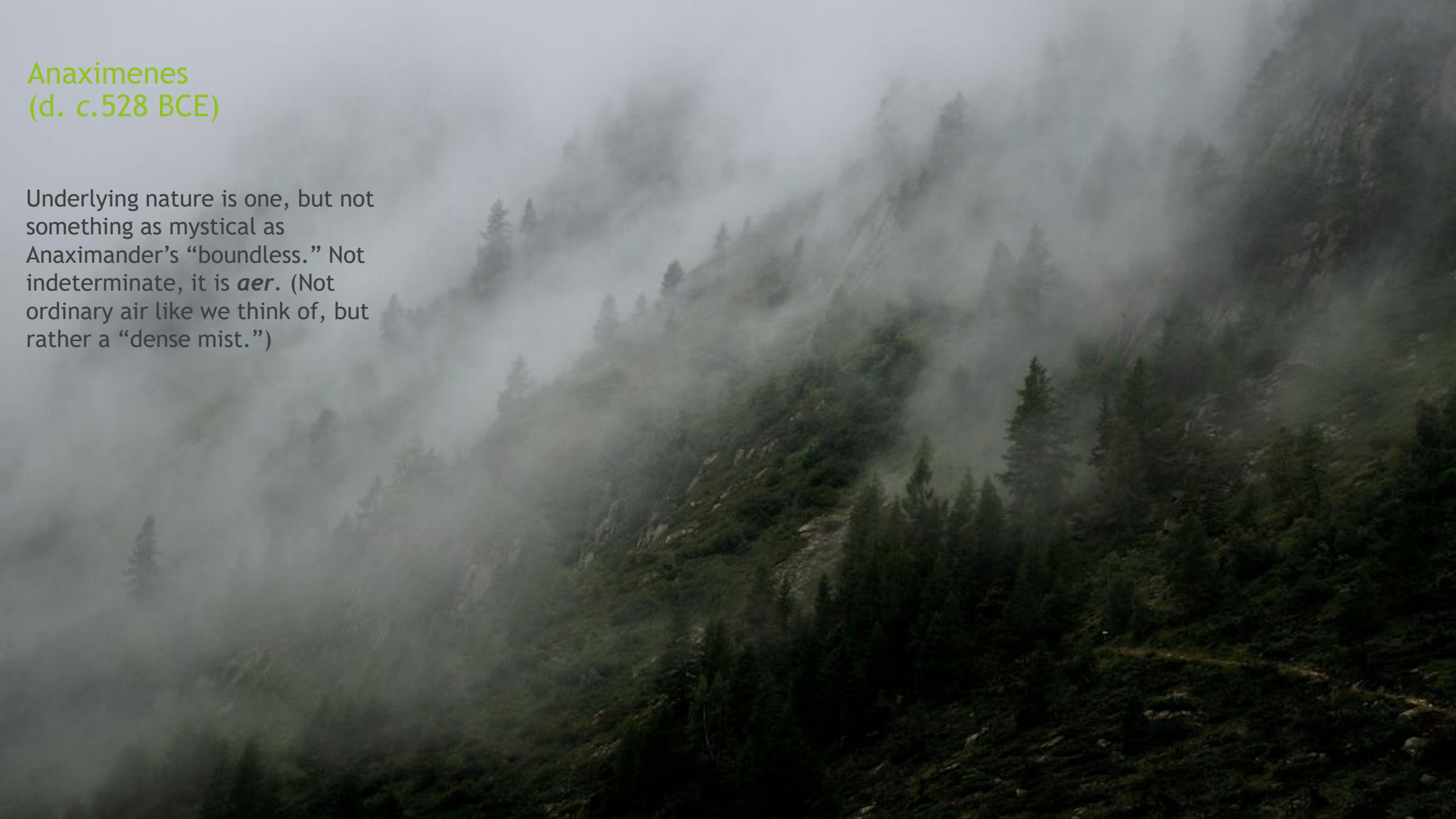
Amaximander (610-546 BCE)

- ▶ The first principle for Anaximander is not a traditional element (the Aristotelian elements are: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire) but instead is “the boundless” or *apeiron*.
- ▶ It “gives birth” to the hot and the cold. From these contraries (the hot and the cold) arise elements and the natural world:

(Earth)	Dense Mist)Stars)Moon)Sun
Earth	Mist	Flame		

Anaximenes (d. c.528 BCE)

Underlying nature is one, but not something as mystical as Anaximander's "boundless." Not indeterminate, it is *aer*. (Not ordinary air like we think of, but rather a "dense mist.")



Anaximenes' Cosmos

For the first time, we get an account of how ordinary objects are made out of the fundamental stuff: *rarefaction* and *condensation* (of the *aer*).

stones earth water clouds wind fire
<most condensed----- most rarefied>

Is this a good scientific theory? Well, we don't exactly accept this. But the important point here is that Anaximenes *has a theory*.