



McKenzie Study Center, an Institute of Gutenberg College

Handout 1
The Bible and the History of Ideas: Some Musings
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The Most Important Pre-Socratic Philosophers

• **Milesian School:**

Thales (630 BC) > Miletus, Ionia

Anaximander (610 BC) > Miletus, Ionia

Anaximenes (585 BC) > Miletus, Ionia

• **Pythagorians:**

Pythagoras (570 BC) > Miletus, Ionia > Croton, southern Italy

• **Heraclitus** (540 BC) > Ephesus

• **Eleatic School:**

Parmenides (515 BC) > Elea, Italy

Zeno of Elea (490 BC) > Elea, Italy

• **Empedocles** (492 BC) > Acragas, southern Sicily

• **Anaxagoras** (500 BC) > Smyrna, Ionia > Athens

• **Atomism:**

Leucippus (470 BC) > Miletus, Ionia

Democritus (460 BC) > Abdera (Ionian colony in Thrace)

Shift from Polytheism to Pre-Socratic Philosophy

Polytheism	Pre-Socratics
complex, fickle, unpredictable gods (gods are understood to be personal gods)	simpler, law-like, predictable “gods” (step toward the possibility of science) (gods are mostly NOT personal gods)
Not particularly rationalistic (empirical)	largely rationalistic
Chaos is ultimate	Chaos is not necessarily ultimate
	Atomism: Chaos is ultimate; cosmos is an “accident”
Cosmos is NOT inherent within reality; it is IMPOSED	Milesian school: Cosmos is inherent within reality, it is in the nature of the reality-shaping elements that compose reality
	Heraclitus: unending cycle moving from chaos to cosmos back to chaos / however, LOGOS is the principle of things = cosmos is inherent within reality
	Pythagoreans: reality is the unlimited {chaos} having the limited {cosmos} imposed on it = however, reality just is the unlimited qualified by the limited, hence = cosmos is inherent within reality
	Atomism: Cosmos is an accidental, chance result of the “Big Swerve”
Gods “above” nature (<i>theologi</i> / god-freaks)	Tendency: Gods are in nature (a kind of panentheism) (<i>physici</i> / nature-freaks)
Presumably, sense experience is our basis for knowledge	Reason is to be granted greater credence than sense experience

Biblical Worldview and the Issues Raised by Pre-Socratic Philosophy

Which is ultimate: chaos or cosmos?

Biblical answer: cosmos! God, is a rational, purposive, ordering mind. He exists when nothing else exists and is the source of all other existence. God created a cosmos where before there was blank sterile nothingness and no ordering principles. He did not impose order on chaos; he created cosmos.

Which is ultimate: change or permanence?

God is a person: he has permanence as the definitive Person that he is, but Persons by their very nature are complex, dynamic, and moving. So God is the permanence of an underlying flux.

Creation is a story: a story has permanence as the definitive story that it is, but stories by their very nature are complex, dynamic, and moving. So, created reality has the permanent identity as a particular story, but it has an underlying flux as the very nature of a story.

Which is more fundamental: unity/simplicity/oneness -or- plurality/complexity/many

The singular mind of God creating a singular purpose for his created order is most fundamental. The many, complexity, and plurality are all components of the singular purpose and story that the one and only God is creating.

Which is the right way to attain knowledge: Rationalism or Empiricism

Reason alone, without empirical data, is inadequate to come to any knowledge of the world and reality. Empirical data alone is meaningless without reason and intelligence capable of interpreting it. Hence, neither radical rationalism nor radical empiricism is right. Right reasoning to knowledge is sound reason from and about empirical data.