

## Some Food for Thought on the Presocratics

As discussed in class, choose at least one, and no more than five, of the following questions and write a total of 10 double-spaced pages. I recommend taking your main task in your paper to be that of convincing me that you have read the relevant material pertaining to your question, have properly understood it and have given the material (both what you've read and what you're writing) some serious thought. Papers will be graded primarily on their accuracy concerning the material discussed and for the cogency and force of the ideas and arguments expressed therein. I would also recommend looking at the little paper on writing essays, which can be found at the link just above the mid-term questions. Happy writing. If you have any further questions about this assignment, don't hesitate to contact me.

1. What intellectual attitudes and assumptions do you think are shared by the presocratics? Are these attitudes and assumptions helpful, detrimental, better, worse, similar, different from other approaches, e.g., the supernatural approach favored by Hesiod and Homer? Discuss enlighteningly.
2. To what extent do you see some of the presocratics violating the principles which are commonly attributed to them, in particular critical rationality, scientific/naturalistic presuppositions, etc.? Discuss.
3. Are the presocratic philosophers or scientists? Defend. (NOTE: If you are inclined to say that it doesn't really matter what we call them, don't write on this question. If you do write on this question, please feel obliged to provide a brief account of both science and philosophy, showing how they and why they differ).
4. a. Does Thales claim that all things are made of water?
4. b. Does Thales claim that water is the source of all things?
4. c. What's the difference, if any, between question a and b?
5. What could water be, if Thales is to be correct that all is (or began with) water? Must it be alive, have self-motion, be a soul, god or good old ordinary H<sub>2</sub>O, or liquid in general? To what extent is a substance/attribute distinction possible or helpful in making sense of Thales? Defend your ideas by judicious appeal to Thales' claims.
6. Can we make sense of the idea that stone or earth is just water, or just liquid? (Or that everything in the universe is just rarefied or condensed air?).

Can opposite or contrary properties be combined in a single object? Can one substance or property change or transform into an opposite substance or property? If no is the proper answer to each of these questions, can the claim that all is water (or the claim that all is air) be saved?

7. Analyze Anaximander's claims about the nature of the arche/principle of the universe and compare and contrast it with the claims of Thales and Anaximenes. In what respects it is to be preferred and in what respects not? Defend your answers.

8. Is Thales' doctrine that 'all began with, and is, water' compatible with his claim that 'all things are full of gods'? If they are not compatible which one do you think Thales should hang on to and why? If they are compatible, say how they are so, despite appearances to the contrary.

9. Does Thales' arché, water, have almost all of the characteristics of Anaximander's apeiron. Examine this possibility, shedding light wherever possible. (Put another way, is Anaximander is guilty of dulling Occam's razor, which says that it's wrong to multiply the entities of your theories beyond necessity).

10. Keeping in mind that the Greek term for God, theos, is used primarily as a predicate, discuss the importance of the divine or divine beings in the views of one or more of the Milesians or Xenophanes or Pythagoras.

11. Allow me to attribute to Thales the following little argument for the view that all is water: At one time, all was water. Nothing has been added or destroyed since this time. Therefore, all is water. Is this a good argument? Defend your answer by appeal to some of Thales' critics or present-day scientific theories.

12. Peek inside the apeiron of Anaximander to see if you can determine the most satisfying story about its nature before the various properties/entities like hot and cold, wet and dry are "broken off". Are the opposites that allegedly have the apeiron as their source simply bound together therein, are they not yet opposites but become such through some process, are they or can they be interacting with each other, helping to create each other? Defend your answer by examining the consequences of your being right.

13. Discuss the nature, cogency and force of Anaximenes' criticism of the apeiron of Anaximander, defending your claims along the way.

14. Compare and contrast Thales and Anaximenes on the issue of the arche. Who has the better arche/principle, and why?

15. Some commentators on the presocratics have suggested that one of the reasons for making water, apeiron, or air the arché of the universe is that each can be said to exhibit self-motion and thus could be seen as alive (perhaps eternally alive). Is this an important trait for the arché to have? Why or why not? What other traits do you think a proper arche ought to have? For example, must there only be one arche? Discuss enlighteningly.

16. Pythagorean doctrines include: the kinship of nature (the relatedness of everything), in particular, the notion that our soul is a piece of the soul that is the universe; form or structure is more important than the material that fills the form; the idea of limit as what engenders intelligibility. Examine any or all of these notions, shedding light on them wherever possible.

17. Pythagoras is said to have been the first to call the universe a kosmos, (although it's translated as order, it also includes the idea of fitness and beauty, as well). He also believed that a human being (and everything in the universe) was a mini-kosmos and that the way to order in the mini-kosmos was by studying the universe (in particular, studying its mathematics and its music). Given this, does Pythagoreanism sound like an attractive philosophy? Why or why not?

18. Discuss the notion that order, beauty and harmony exist when members of the Pythagorean's "limited list" dominate or control the members of their "unlimited list".

19. What is Xenophanes' conception of God and to what extent is it successful in providing a BETTER conception of God than that provided by Homer and Hesiod, or that of the average person? Defend your answer.

20. Spell out the criticism of standard accounts of god found in Xenophanes' claims that if cows and other animals had hands, they'd draw the forms of gods as animals like themselves and then discuss the extent to which you find it a viable critique of our stories about god or of our god talk altogether.

21. Discuss Xenophanes's famous claim: "If god had not created yellow honey, they would say that figs are far sweeter."

22. Recall Heraclitus' claim that he is like the Oracle at Delphi in that he gives a sign. What are some of the "signs" which you see Heraclitus giving us? Give us an insight into their meaning, wherever possible.

23. What does Heraclitus mean by "logos" and what role does it play in his philosophy?

24. How and why does Heraclitus criticize Homer and Pythagoras, and what does he offer us as an alternative to their illegitimate wisdom? At some point,

address the issue of the legitimacy of Heraclitus' complaints and the viability of his own account.

25. What, according to Heraclitus, are some of the misconceptions that most human beings labor under? On which do you agree with him and on which do you disagree?, and why?

26. Discuss Heraclitus' so-called doctrine of flux (constant change), with particular attention to the case of stepping in the river. Do you think that this doctrine threatens our ordinary descriptions of the world and if so, is that a good or bad thing?

27. Discuss Heraclitus' suggestion that all things one, including opposites by judicious appeal to his many examples of alleged opposites being found in one and the same thing. In what sense or senses is it true, in what sense or senses false, and which of these senses do you find most important? Discuss.

28. Discuss the role and significance of war and strife in the philosophy of Heraclitus.

29. Discuss the role and importance of fire in the philosophy of Heraclitus.

30. Critically analyze Parmenides' claim that what is must be and what is not cannot be, making it as coherent as possible. In particular, why must "what is" be, and why is "what is not" a bogus and illegitimate way of truth? And why is Parmenides untroubled by our everyday observation of change, motion and plurality? Discuss and defend.

31. In class I claimed that Heraclitus MTs what Parmenides MPs, which involves them agreeing on the claim: If the law of noncontradiction is true then change is impossible. Which of the two arguments, if either, do you prefer and why?

32. Does Parmenides succeed in "extinguishing" the possibility of "coming to be" (or motion or plurality) and "destruction"? Why or why not?

33. Offer an interpretation of Parmenides' claim that "thinking and the thought that it is are the same", along with any interesting or problematic consequences that you see flowing from it.

34. Can we think what is not? If not, why not, according to Parmenides? If we can, is it not a good thing that we can?

35. Critically analyze the main differences between Parmenides' Way of Truth and his Way of Opinion, spreading truth or opinion wherever possible.

36. Do you think that everything you think of you think of as existing? Defend your answer by reference to some of the arguments from Parmenides.

37. Analyze and assess one or more of Zeno's paradoxes for cogency and convincibility, defending your claims along the way.

38. Discuss the way(s) in which Anaxagoras' philosophy respects Parmenides' claims about the nature of Being and any ways in which he seems not to do this. 50. Do the same for Empedocles. 51. Do the same for the Atomists, with special attention to their notion of VOID.

39. Analyze and assess Anaxagoras' claim that everything is, or is in, everything.

40. Analyze and discuss Democritus' claim: By convention sweet, by convention bitter; by convention hot, by convention cold; by convention color; but in reality: atoms and the void.

## Socrates/Plato Questions

1. Can or do people do evil knowingly? Defend your answer.

2. Critically analyze Socrates' claim that virtue is knowledge, defending your claims along the way.

3. What are the virtues of Socratic elenchus and what are its drawbacks? Defend.

4. Do you think Socrates is competent to determine whether someone cares more about wealth, honor and reputation than about the state of their soul? Why or why not?

5. Is the unexamined life worth living? Why or why not?

6. Is the examined life worth living? Why or why not?

7. Which is "more important", tending the soul or the "material" side of life? Which is to be preferred, tending the soul or the "material" side of life?

8. Are there single right answers, or any right answers, to Socrates' questions about piety, courage, justice, virtue, etc.? If there are, what are our prospects for finding these answers. If there aren't (or if our prospects for finding the answers are nil), what are our prospects for a universal or objective moral code (and therewith our prospects for one big happy planet)?

9. Analyze Socrates' defense before the court. Where do you find it convincing and where unconvincing? Would you have voted to acquit him? Would you have voted to execute him or accept his proposal of a 30 minae fine? Defend your analysis where necessary.
10. Would Socrates grant amnesty to war resisters? Would Socrates have taken a drink during Prohibition? Would he smoke marijuana now?
11. What, if anything, is wrong with every person being free to determine for himself or herself whether or not a law is just? As always, defend your answer.
12. Set out and assess Socrates' complaints against Euthyphro's first definition of piety, viz., what the gods love is pious . . . .
13. Discuss the pros and cons of Socrates claim that his relationship to the State is that of a child to its parent. What do you think of this comparison?
14. Is there a limit to the authority of parents over their children? Consider this question with respect to Socrates.
15. Has Socrates "really" entered into a "contract" with the State to obey the law? If so, what are the terms of the contract? Are contracts binding under any and all circumstances? Discuss enlighteningly the nature of contractual obligation.
16. Given that the gods love the pious because it's pious (rather than that it's pious because the gods love it), it would seem that any attempt to identify the pious (or more generally the good, right and just) with a group's attitudes or reactions is wrongheaded. Is this a problem? Why or why not?
17. Is the examined life, as defined by Socrates, THE road to happiness? Discuss enlighteningly.
18. Give an account of what Socrates' disavowal of knowledge comes to and then say to what extent and in what ways it is ironical.
19. Is knowledge of the essence of X a sine qua non (an indispensable condition) for knowing anything about X? Defend.
20. Is Socrates always fair to Euthyphro? Defend your answer by appeal to specific cases.
21. What is piety? Put yourself in Euthyphro's shoes and respond to Socrates' questioning as you see fit.

22. Agree or disagree with Socrates and Euthyphro that piety is loved by all the Gods because it pious, and not vice-versa. Defend your agreement or disagreement.

23. Explain, elucidate and evaluate Socrates' reasons in the "Crito" for not escaping from prison, defending your evaluation along the way.