

Justice in Particular

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Professor P. J. Kozyris

**Stumbling over the 'Boundary Stone
of Greek Philosophy'**

Two Centuries of Translating the Anaximander Fragment

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Stumbling over the ‘Boundary Stone of Greek Philosophy’

Two Centuries of Translating the Anaximander Fragment

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...ΕΞ ΩΝ ΔΕ Η ΓΕΝΕΣΙΣ ΕΣΤΙ ΤΟΙΣ ΟΥΣΙ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΦΘΟΡΑΝ ΕΙΣ
ΤΑΥΤΑ ΓΙΝΕΣΘΑΙ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟ ΧΡΕΩΝ – ΔΙΔΟΝΑΙ ΓΑΡ ΑΥΤΑ ΔΙΚΗΝ ΚΑΙ
ΤΙΣΙΝ ΑΛΛΗΛΟΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΔΙΚΙΑΣ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΗΝ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΤΑΞΙΝ...

The fragment of Anaximander presents one of the strongest hermeneutic challenges known to modern philology and philosophy. What we have at our disposal is a rare palimpsest: we readers of the 21st century are trying to understand the Neoplatonist Simplicius who writes in AD 532 a commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*, responding to an earlier commentary (1st redaction 517, 2nd 529) on the *Physics* by the Monophysite John Philoponus, and cites *The Physicists’ Opinions/Physikon doxai* (270 BC?) by the Peripatetic Theophrastus, which itself discusses Aristotle’s work (350 BC?) referring to Anaximander’s book on nature (570 BC?). Clearly, both the chronological depth and the intertextual breadth of the passage are daunting. Since at least the early 19th century, philosophers and scholars have speculated in great detail on who exactly cites whom in the Simplicius passage, as they have attempted to establish the extent of each quotation and above all capture Anaximander’s words through this dense philoso-philological echo. In its turn, this hermeneutic labor has generated its own resonance, which reverberates toward the future and compels commentators to cite, in addition to the ancient sources, their modern predecessors as well.

And yet we remain lured by the same promise – to hear the very first philosophical voice, read the first treatise in prose, witness the

emergence of history, and experience the origin of Western self-awareness. This lure can be even greater for the Greek speaker who, twenty six centuries later, continues to use words like *arche*, *stoi-cheion*, *apeiron*, *physis*, *ouranos*, *cosmos*, *genesis*, *ftora*, *dike*, *adikia*, *chronos*, *taxis*, and many more in his everyday speech. Of course we postmoderns know that hermeneutics is a chimerical enterprise, that the origin represents an ever-receding trace, and that the palimpsest opens the yawning abyss of signification. And yet we are irresistibly drawn to beginnings, if not as origins, at least as contested moments of founding. We may no longer hope for revelation but we are still intrigued by those who, blissfully unaware of our skepticism, offered confident answers.

A close examination of such answers given to Anaximander's puzzle over the last two hundred years suggests that they can be divided into six categories according to their approach.

1. Moral interpretations focus on guilt and punishment. Writers like Ritter, Nietzsche, and Cornford assume that, as a transgression of boundaries and infraction of order, birth constitutes a crime, and perishing comes as reparation for the unrighteousness of separate existence. In the words of Rohde, "all separate creations out of the 'Unlimited' ... must 'in the order of the time' pay the penalty for the 'offence' of [their] separate existence, and lose [themselves] again in the one primordial matter" (1925: 366). Individuality requires illegitimate separation from an original unity, and can only lead to injury and expiation.

2. Anthropological interpretations begin with a primordial crime. Diagnosticians like Freud, Girard, and Serres posit that violence destroys unity, not only at the beginning of human existence but also in returning cycles. Rites of unification, religious prohibition, and civilizational control cannot stop the sin of culture from its catastrophic comeback. Freud traced this belief back to Orphism:

"The theory of primal sin is of Orphic origin; it was preserved in the mysteries and thence penetrated into the philosophic schools of Greek antiquity. Men were the descendants of the Titans, who had killed and dismembered the young Dionysus-

Zagreus; the weight of this crime oppressed them. A fragment of Anaximander says that the unity of the world was destroyed by a primordial crime and everything that issued from it must carry on the punishment for this crime." (1966: 924)

Different myths offer different versions of original guilt.

3. Ontological interpretations explore relations between being and beings with special emphasis on the role of difference. Critics of metaphysics like Heidegger, Arendt, and Derrida are not interested in ethical and social norms but in emergence, appearance, presence, and lingering – in the coming forth and passing away of beings. They also explore the coming and passing of ontology and the trace it has left in the dominant Western tradition. Jan Patočka describes their starting point as follows:

"Each individual thing – we have to look at this entirely concretely – not only does it come into being and then perish, but also each manifests itself in that another veils and conceals itself. After all, each thing passes from the near to the far, from presence to unpresence, from presence in its original to presence in solely deficient modes. And in this is *adikia* (injustice), committed by the present thing in its suppressing all others. *Adikia* is injustice, but here it is not injustice in the moral sense." (2002: 61)

This is the realm of philosophy minus the agitation of ethics.

4. Juridical interpretations argue that Anaximander's view draws on legal procedure, deducing principles from litigation. Classicists like Lloyd-Jones, Goldhill, and McKirahan believe that, since this cosmology turns on principles of justice, it must reflect legal norms of late archaic period in Asia Minor. Their approach encourages greater knowledge of Greek courts and related practices. "The universal and necessary connection that binds things in the cosmic cycle is evidently conceived here in the moral/juridical terms of guilt and punishment rather those of causal explanation" (Vegetti 1999: 273). This is an area of historicist inquiry.

5. Political interpretations find that cosmological and egalitarian ideas emerge together in the early 6th century. Progressive thinkers like Vlastos, Vernant, and Lloyd (1966: 212-15) detect in the fragment the

beginnings of isonomy as Greek thought overcomes dynasty and hierarchy to embrace a differentiated world of opposed but balanced forces.

"In the Anaximandean theory there is no *monarchia* to establish and maintain order. There is no place for the *monarchia* of one element over all the rest. Indeed the rule of one element over all the others is identified as being destructive. But what ties the parts together, if not some kind of hierarchical arrangement? The Milesian answer was to postulate an *isonomia*, or balance, of parts, and more specifically, a balance of opposing parts. ... *The city was a social and political form in which parts were arranged in opposition rather than in hierarchy.*" (Murphy 2001: 46)

This is another area of historicist inquiry that has been also combined with speculative history.

6. Scientific interpretations also encourage a better historical understanding not so much of institutions as of the sciences. Scholars like Havelock, Kahn, and Kagis do not consider theoretical or ideological frameworks but instead find that, as a natural philosopher, Anaximander is drawing on the sciences of his era which studied the organic structure of the universe such as astronomy, geometry, geography, and meteorology. Charles Kahn concludes:

"The old Ionic theory of the elements is thus characterized by the same geometric symmetry which prevails in Anaximander's celestial scheme. The equilibrium of the earth at the center of a spherical world is reflected in the mathematical proportion by which the elements are bound to one another. These parts belong together in a unified whole, a community whose balance of power is maintained by periodic readjustments, in accordance with that general law of astronomical cycles which Anaximander conceived as an immutable *taxis* of Time." (1994: 188)

Seasonal regularity governs the universe.

Like every categorization, this grouping of Anaximandean readings is a quite schematic one that cannot do justice to the complexity of most interpretations, which draw on more than one approach. Given this complexity, given that readings may incorporate, say, anthropo-

logical, legal, moral, or political elements, one might be tempted to hope for more eclectic interpretations that combine several insights. This hope for an inclusive understanding vanishes once we look at specific renderings of the fragment (e.g., Seaford 2004: 190-209). They differ radically because the length of their Greek text varies, the attribution to individual authors (Simplicius, Theophrastus, Aristotle, Anaximander) varies too, their etymological dispositions diverge, and above all because they belong to diverse interpretive communities and bring corresponding techniques and ideologies to the task.

Furthermore, as it has been already mentioned, certain renderings generate their own interpretive tradition. Heidegger provides a fascinating example. In a 1941 course, he offers the following translation (incidentally, his second one) of the fragment:

"Whence emergence is for what respectively presences also an eluding into this (as into the Same), emerges accordingly the compelling need; there is namely what presences itself (from itself), the fit, and each is respected (acknowledged) by the other, (all of this) from overcoming the unfit according to the allotment of temporalizing time." (1993: 87)

In a 1946 essay, Heidegger produces a third translation. This one is shorter because, while in 1941 he accepted a passage larger than Diels', in the essay he narrows his text to only a part of Diels': "...along the lines of usage; for they let order and thereby also reckon belong to one another (in the surmounting) of disorder" (1984: 57).

These two renderings are by themselves hard to translate into English, harder to comprehend, and probably impossible to reconcile. And yet Kenneth Maly decides to ignore their divergence and conflates them as follows:

"The place from out of which emergence comes is, for everything that emerges, also the place of disappearance into this (as into the same) – in accordance with exigence (brook); for they let enjoining and thereby also reckon belong to each other (in the getting over) of disjoining, responding to the directive of time's coming into its own." (1993: 231)

Korab-Karpowicz adopts the same approach (conflating Heidegger's two renderings) but provides his own translation:

"Being as the ordering of beings into being is unlimited in the sense that it refuses any possible limit, for it is not a being. But from whence is the coming forth for each being, also into this (as into the same) the going away comes forth, *answering to the compelling need. For they [beings] let order belong, and thereby also respect, to one another (in getting over) of disorder, answering to the assignment of what is timely in time.*" (2002: 404)

Two eminent readers of Heidegger have disagreed with him in different ways. In the section "Willing" of *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt thinks that Anaximander says something else and paraphrases accordingly:

"[E]verything we know has become, has emerged from some previous darkness into the light of day; and this becoming remains its law while it lasts: its lasting is at the same time its passing-away. Becoming, the law that rules beings, is now the opposite of Being; when, in passing-away, becoming ceases, it changes again into that Being from whose sheltering, concealing darkness it originally emerged." (1978: 191)

A few years earlier, Jacques Derrida ignores the Greek thinker altogether and focuses on his favorite project, the forgetting of the Greeks:

"If Being, according to the Greek forgetting which would have been the very form of its advent, has never meant anything except beings, then perhaps difference is older than being itself. There may be a difference still more unthought than the difference between Being and beings. ... Beyond being and beings, this difference, ceaselessly differing from and deferring (itself), would trace (itself) (by itself) – this *différance* would be the first or last trace if one could still speak, here, of origin and end." (1982: 66-7)

As we can see, Heidegger's Anaximander has formed a branch of the fragment's interpretive tradition, a subtradition of its own.

Heidegger's fascination with the philosopher goes back at least to 1926, and has produced different views, indeed, different fragments.

Others have gone to their own extraordinary lengths to master the Anaximander fragment. For example, Eric Havelock has come up with an imaginative (re)composition of the Greek original:

"*gignomen' ex arches kai phtheiromen' aien apeirou alleloisi chronoï tinota diken en ageroi*
becoming and destructing ever from boundless beginning,
to each other in circle of seasons paying justice in retribution. (1983: 81)

It is worth repeating that this Greek text is not a fragment that has survived but rather a figment of Havelock's philological imagination. Taking yet another approach, artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (1981) has produced a little art book where he illustrates with his own original works eleven renderings of the fragment like the ones we have been discussing. What is it then, we might ask, that makes those few obscure Greek words so thought provoking and allows for such variety and density of opinions?

Looking closely at the six approaches described above, two themes emerge as the prevailing interpretive modalities. One is the theme of originary injustice: several writers emphasize a violent infraction, a primordial discord, an emancipatory transgression that violates original unity and brings the world as we know it into existence. For example, Hegel suggests that the sense of the fragment "is approximately this: 'Out of the Infinite, infinite heavenly spheres and infinite worlds have been set apart; but they carry within them their own destruction, because they only are through constant dividing off.' That is, since the Infinite is the principle, separation is the positing of a difference, i.e. of a determination or something finite" (1955: 188). The second main theme is the supreme order of the existing world: other writers concentrate on the geometry of settlement, the balance of reciprocity, the equilibrium of opposites which prevail in an isonomic regime. In the chapter "The City-State and Its Ideal of Justice" of the 1st volume of *Paideia*, Werner Jaeger emphasizes "the close connexion between the origins of Ionian philosophy and the birth of the constitutional city-state" (1939: 110). He returns to the original meaning of *cosmos*, which

“signifies the *right order* in a state or other community. The philosopher, by projecting the idea of a political cosmos upon the whole of nature, claims that isonomia and not pleonexia must be the leading principle not only of human life but of the nature of things; and his claim is a striking witness to the fact that in his age the new political ideal of justice and law had become the centre of all thought, the basis of existence, the real source of men’s faith in the purpose and meaning of the world.” (110)

What is it that accounts for the cosmos? The first view sees sin, the other, symmetry. Sin makes existence a matter of wrong and reparation, generation and destruction; symmetry makes existence a matter of cyclical regularity, of seasonal adjustment. The former obeys the ordinance of time, the latter follows the order of nature. To use two central notions of post-Enlightenment cosmology, these views of the Anaximander fragment correspond to necessity and freedom respectively. Together, these notions express the “contradictory nature of the world” (Nietzsche) caught between being and beings, being and becoming, unity and separation, order and emancipation, *chreon*/determination and the indeterminate *apeiron*. Stephen David Ross begins Chapter 1, “Injustice’s Debt,” of his book as follows: “We struggle to retell Anaximander’s tale of an archaic injustice, *adikia*, that inflicts upon us a debt before time; of an archaic injustice whose restitution requires endless time; of a justice, *dike*, that circulates as strife, *polemos*, within the ordinance of time and law” (1993: 1).

Since early German Romanticism, necessity and freedom represent the dialectical poles of the modern tragic and can explain why the fragment has been irresistibly meaningful to us. It is not an accident that so many commentators, from Nietzsche to Heidegger and from Vlastos to Castoriadis, have used the tragic idea to explicate it fully. In part, there is an obvious historical connection between early philosophy and tragedy. Simon Goldhill brings it to the fore when he discusses Anaximander in the context of *dike* ‘justice,’ ‘right,’ ‘proper,’ ‘legal,’ ‘retribution,’ ‘punishment,’ ‘lawcourt,’ ‘law-case’ vs. *hubris* ‘excess,’ ‘transgression,’ ‘insolence,’ ‘assault.’ He notes that

“the connections articulated by the language of *dike* between what

is ‘just’, what is ‘natural’ and a sense of the order and fixedness of things is important not only in the philosophers’ systems but also in tragedy’s questioning of the system of thought from which it arises, its interrogation of the sense of that is right, proper, natural as well as man’s rightful place in the order of things.” (1986: 36)

Furthermore, there is an equally strong connection between modern philosophy and tragedy since Idealism emerged in part as an attempt to grasp tragic drama by composing, analyzing, and theorizing it. Modern readers interpret Anaximander through the dialectic of destiny and will. Whether they see the mechanisms of destiny in the crime of emergence or the operations of will in the settlement of right, they point to the tragic dimension of self-regulated existence: human emancipation in the immanent cosmic order entails the tragedy of existence caught between necessity and freedom as it must devise its own limits. It is indeed in their interest in human limits that two very different philosophers, Heidegger and Castoriadis, converge.

If we live in a world of motion, conflict, and change, from where can we derive legitimate criteria for the right? If we are not ruled by religious, political or other hierarchies, how do we know what is fitting? What constitutes a cosmos when *arche* means principle more than rule, and when we are looking at elements more than beginnings? Cornelius Castoriadis argued that

“from this fragment on, what emerges implicitly is what we may call the divergence, the schism, the bursting-open that is recreated again and again at the heart of philosophical inquiry; this ultimate duality [that is] simultaneously inescapable and insuperable, whatever we may do. On the one hand, there are (i.e., *esti*) beings (i.e., *onta*), and we can qualify them, attribute to them some properties/characteristics, even try to define their essence [using] the third connotation of the verb to be of which we talked the other time. But there is also that according to which is that which is, *kata to khreon*; in other words, the law, which is no longer simply a characteristic of the beings themselves, but a consistency, a general norm, a necessity to which everything must obey

whatever may be their particular character – this is just that: the *khreon*. We, therefore, find ourselves before a type of dichotomy, an inevitable duality between being and the principle or the law of being.” (2004: 204)

Anaximander’s words seem to address the deepest contradictions of the modern project of autonomy. They speak not simply about *dike* and *adikia* but about *to chreon* which requires their reciprocity. Kostas Papaioannou captured this eloquently:

“The Tragic is founded on this ‘chreon,’ which is mandated – the way the carrying out of a court decision is mandated – by the force which holds beings to Being, which ‘saves,’ preserves the cosmos above the annihilating forces which it carries within itself. ... What Hubris starts, Dike completes, cosmos recovers its law, and humans recover their identity.” (2000: 63)

These forces point to a tragic rhythm of intensity, a pattern of dynamic change, a precarious fit without ultimate foundation or guarantee. And they leave space and time indefinitely open in the infinite domain of *apeiron*. Thus the claim about an unbounded unity appeals to our skepticism, to a contemporary quest for orientation which we embrace (much more than fear) as liberatingly tragic. Vivasvan Soni defines such a quest incisively by describing the hermeneutic horizon of happiness:

“Oriented by the question of happiness, we are like travelers in a desert, scanning the horizon, wondering which way to go. One cannot help but move towards the horizon, whichever direction one chooses, yet it is never a goal that one can reach. The horizon guides without goal, it beckons while always receding, it is telos without teleology. There is nowhere we have to get to, but we can and must ask what the way was like. The point is not to reach the horizon: I am not saying that happiness always eludes us. The horizon is simply the boundless space toward which we move, guided by the question of happiness. It specifies the limitless limit which is at once the opening of possibilities and the specification of a set of constraints, the opening of possibilities through the specification of constraints.” (Soni, forthcoming)

This beckoning horizon is the Anaximandrian goal toward which we move. I dedicate my study to Phaedon Kozyris with gratitude for his steadfast focus on the goal – his life-long mission which has opened up the horizon to several generations of students, colleagues, friends, and comrades.

Note: I am grateful to Vassiliki Leontis and Bernd Steinbock for valuable help with translations. I am also grateful to my colleagues, Richard Janko and James Porter, for giving me the opportunity to present an earlier version of this paper at the colloquium “Philosophy before Socrates: Old Questions, New Answers,” held at the University of Michigan on January 28, 2005.

Further Renderings of the Anaximander Fragment

(in chronological order of composition)

“Simplicius said: ‘Anaximander has taught that, (from) where things come into being, (into) there they also decay in accordance with necessity; for they pay damages and are penalized for their injustice in accordance with the order of time.’ Thus Anaximander regarded the worlds’ and skies’ coming into being out of the unlimited original being (i.e. *to apeiron*) as an unjust act, like a kind of downfall from the highest, legitimate power, and called for the existence of the idea of an almighty justice in order that this misdeed will receive its penalty. It seemed to him that the world’s decay, its destruction, which is also confirmed by many others, happens in this way” (Ritter 188: 1821).

“‘Whence things originated, there they must also pass away/return & perish according to necessity; for they must pay penalty and be judged for their injustice(s), according to the ordinance of time.’ Enigmatic proclamation of a true pessimist, oracular legend over the boundary stone of Greek philosophy: how shall we interpret you?” (Nietzsche 1962: 45-46) Nietzsche reads Anaximander as the first thinker who recognized “the basic poor quality of any and all human life” and who extracted “that melancholy doctrine from its application to human life” and projected it “unto the general quality of all

existence. It may not be logical, but it certainly is human, to view now, together with Anaximander, all coming-to-be as though it were an illegitimate emancipation from eternal being, a wrong for which destruction is the only penance" (46-7). "Anaximander – natural extinction and generation [interpreted] morally in terms of guilt and punishment" (1979: 135).

"Things perish into those things out of which they have their birth, according to that which is ordained; for they give reparation to one another and pay the penalty of their injustice according to the disposition of time" (8). "What especially strikes us in Anaximander's statement is that the secular process of birth and perishing is described in *moral* language. The passing away of things into the elements is called 'making reparation,' 'paying the penalty of injustice.' The words imply that injustice was committed in the very fact of their birth into separate existence. The manifold world, in Anaximander's view, can arise only by robbery and misappropriation. ... We see, then, that the general scheme of the growth of the world is this: the one primary stuff, called 'Nature,' is segregated into provinces, each the domain of one element. And this is a *moral* order, in the sense that transgression of its boundaries, the plundering of one element by another to make an individual thing, is injustice, unrighteousness. The penalty is death and dissolution. No single thing can begin to exist without an infraction of this destined order. Birth is a crime, and growth an aggravated robbery" (Cornford 1912: 10).

"On this interpretation we can explain the strictly reciprocal nature of injustice and reparation in Fragment 1. The Boundless itself, being perfectly blended, must be a state of dynamic equilibrium. In no portion of it can any power dominate another and thus commit 'injustice.' Only when the world-forming segregation occurs can separate powers show up. Thereafter, wherever one of these is strong enough to encroach upon another, 'injustice' will result. When the world is, in due course, reabsorbed into the Boundless, the opposites are *not* destroyed. They do *not* cease to exist. They are only blended once again, and their equilibrium is perfectly restored. And this must entail a process of 'reparation,' where unjust gains are disgorged and unjust

losses fully made up. Thus at no time is there either injustice against the boundless or reparation to it. Reabsorption into the Boundless is only the process which ensures full reparation among the opposites themselves; the damages are paid not to the Boundless but to *one another*" (Vlastos 1993: 80). "Thus the Boundless 'governs' the world throughout its growth and decline. This is never a matter of direct action by the Boundless upon the inner structure of the world, for the whole of the cosmology is delineated in terms of the interaction of the opposites themselves upon one another. The Boundless 'governs' by 'encompassing,' i.e., by safeguarding the original equality of the opposites with one another. If this equality is maintained, justice is assured, for no opposite will be strong enough to dominate another" (81).

"For Anaximander, all elements 'mutually and in sequence offer to one another reparation (*tisis*) and justice (*dike*) for the *adikia* [injustice] they have committed.' A world made up of opposed and endlessly conflicting *dynameis* subjected them to a rule of compensatory justice, an order that preserved them in exact *isotes* [equality]. Under the yoke of a *dike* that is the same for all, the elementary forces are connected and coordinated in a regular rhythm, so that despite their multiplicity and diversity, they form a single cosmos" (Vernant 1962: 123).

"What Heidegger wants to mark is this: the difference between Being and beings, the forgotten of metaphysics, has disappeared without leaving a trace. The very trace of difference has been submerged. If we maintain that *différance* (is) (itself) other than absence and presence, if it *traces*, then when it is a matter of the forgetting of the difference (between being and beings), we would have to speak of a disappearance of the trace of the trace. ... The erasure of the early trace (*die frühe Spur*) of difference is therefore the 'same' as its tracing in the text of metaphysics. This latter must have maintained the mark of what it has lost, reserved, put aside. The paradox of such a structure, in the language of metaphysics, is an inversion of metaphysical concepts, which produces the following effect: the present becomes the sign of the sign, the trace of the trace. It is no longer what every reference refers to in the last analysis. It becomes a function in a

structure of generalized reference. It is a trace, and a trace of the erasure of the trace. ... The 'early trace' of difference is lost in an invisibility without return, and yet its very loss is sheltered, retained, seen, delayed. In a text. In the form of presence. In the form of the proper. Which itself is only an effect of writing" (Derrida 1982a: 23-4).

"Anaximander spoke of the order of universe in terms of Dike. 'Destruction comes to existing things,' he wrote, 'from the same source from which existence comes to them in accordance with destiny; for they pay each other penalty and retribution for their injustice according to the assessment of time'" (Lloyd-Jones 1971: 79-80).

"I conclude that "symbolic rites of unification gave birth to all religious forms ... There everything begins, from there everything emanates; there everything returns when discord breaks out. Surely that is the point of the only direct quotation we have of Anaximander, 'the earliest voice of western thought.' I would like to repeat those astonishing words here, to show that such a claim is not unbelievable. In the evolution from ritual to secular institutions men gradually draw away from violence and eventually lose sight of it; but an actual break with violence never takes place. That is why violence can always stage a stunning, catastrophic comeback. The possibility of such an occurrence conforms to the dire predictions of divine vengeance that are to be found in every religious system" (Girard 1972: 307-8).

"Anaximander ... said that the principle – that is to say the essence – of beings is the infinite ... and that it is neither water nor any other of the so-called 'elements,' but a certain other infinite nature, from which are born all the heavens and the worlds within them; it is 'that from which there is, for beings, generation; in it destruction also takes place, according to what must be; for beings render justice and reparation to one another, from their mutual injustice, according to the summons of Time,' as he says in somewhat poetical terms" (Serres 1993: 135).

"In Anaximander ... the 'element' of being is the *apeiron*, the indeterminate, indefinite – another way of thinking chaos. Form, the particularized and determinate existence of the various beings, is *adikia*, injustice – one may well call it *hubris*. That is why the particu-

lar beings have to render justice to one another and pay compensation for their injustice through their decay and disappearance. There is a strong though implicit connection between the two pairs of opposite terms, *chaos/cosmos* and *hubris/dike*. In a sense, the latter is the transposition of the former into the human domain" (Castoriadis 1991: 103-4).

Paraphrasing Simplicius' citation: "The *arche* ('beginning,' not Aristotelian 'material principle') of all the elements (qualitative, not hypostatized, as Simplicius inevitably understands them) is not one of these elements themselves, but some different boundless nature (*hetera tis physis apeiros*), from which all the heavens (*ouranoi*) arise, and the *kosmoi* (orders) within these heavens. And ... out of these *kosmoi* is the generation *for*, not *of*, existing things, and into these existing things destruction takes place according to what needs must be, for they (existing things, *onta*) make amends and give reparation to one another for their wrongdoing (*adikia*) according to the order of time" (McEwen 1993: 13-4).

"A notable feature of the fragment is its legal language" 'pay penalty and retribution,' 'injustice,' and 'the ordering of time' (as if time plays the role of a judge assessing penalties in criminal trials). ... In Greek, DIKE ('justice') and its opposite have descriptive as well as evaluative force. Descriptively, injustice is taking something not one's own; evaluatively it is bad. This evaluation applies to all acts that, descriptively, are unjust, regardless of the nature of the agent. Further, the idea that justice or retribution comes inevitably accords with a view of justice expressed by other authors of the Archaic period, and the notion that the cosmic principle of justice is fair to the rival contenders is doubtless due to the ideal of justice on which the legal system known to Anaximander was based. All Greek philosophers assume that the world we perceive is a world of change and motion. Anaximander expresses this idea in describing the world as the scene of opposites in a continuous conflict, which is governed by necessity and justice" (McKirahan 1994: 45).

"The fragment of Anaximander, our first text to represent an impersonal universe, reflects this vital social pressure towards the

impersonal. On the one hand the opposites reflect antagonists, under the control of the polis, 'giving compensation to each other.' But they also reflect the impersonal transaction into which this interpersonal relationship must, if the polis is to survive, be resolved, a transaction in which the opposed items (injury and compensation, each closely associated with one of the opposed parties) are transformed and annihilated into each other. In this way we can make sense of the paradoxical notion, made inescapable by *gar* in the fragment, that the opposites' payment of compensation to each other is also loss of their identity" (Seaford 2004: 203-4).

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Abstract

Very few Greek passages in modern times have attracted as much interest as the famous fragment of Anaximander. The fact that it is considered the earliest piece of philosophy and that its length remains unclear contributes to its allure. Thinkers from several fields and directions have tried to unlock its secret, hoping to recover the very first voice of western reason. It is remarkable that so many schools of thought have have clashed over the import of so few words. This paper maps the terrain of the fragment's interpretive history over the last two centuries and attempts to explain the intellectual stakes in this persistent effort to explicate what Anaximander really said.