

Exploring the Role of Dialectic in Anaximander's Philosophy

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Abstract

Dialectic has been a fundamental part of philosophy since the time of Anaximander, which is a method of argumentation and reasoning. Anaximander's thought is deeply rooted in the Milesian school of philosophy, where philosophers used dialectic to explore and explain life and the world. This philosophical method focuses on the idea of opposites and how they interact and influence each other to create a more complete understanding of the ideas. The presence of dialectic in Anaximander's philosophy is evident in his Apeiron which allowed him to challenge and question existing ideas. This article will explore the role of dialectic in Anaximander's philosophy, including an analysis of his Apeiron and how it shaped his philosophical ideas. To reach its conclusion, this article applies an analytical approach and depends on secondary sources of data. By studying Anaximander's philosophy through a dialectical lens, we can gain a deeper appreciation for his contributions to Western philosophy as well as to the realm of knowledge.

Keywords: Anaximander, Apeiron, separation, dialectic, dialectic in anaximander's philosophy

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1. Introduction

From the beginning of philosophy to the present day, a variety of approaches for analyzing and understanding fundamental philosophical questions have been used. A dispassionate analysis of the history of philosophy reveals that, since the beginnings of philosophy, a method has taken its place indirectly or directly in the discourses of philosophers and continues to have a strong impact on philosophers' thinking to this day, which is known as the dialectic or dialectical method. Its main objective is to find the truth between them or the contradiction of one thing with its opposite. Dialectic arises and exists indirectly or directly in people's personal, family, social, political, economic, and even state life. Essentially, dialectic has a function to play in the progress of everything. It also contributes to the destruction of something old and the creation of something new. As a result, dialectic in human existence is acknowledged as a continual fact. This ancient truth has been institutionalized and methodically modified by philosophers of many ages. The Greek philosopher Anaximander used the notion of Apeiron to reach his conclusion about the genesis of the cosmos and the evolution of humans and other things, including animals. His Apeiron is uncreated, indestructible, and has infinite motion even though everything is formed, and in which everything reverts; indicating the presence of the underlying dialectic in his philosophy to correctly function his conceptions. That is why, based on secondary sources, this article contends that Anaximander was one of the first philosophers to use dialectic to address philosophical issues to shape his philosophical ideas.

2. Anaximander's Legacy as a Pre-Socratic Philosopher

From a logical standpoint, philosophy, explains the fundamental problems of life and the universe. Philosophy, which we are now studying, has a long history that is frequently classified into four epochs: ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary (Philosophy, n.d.). Anaximander (610-546/45 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher as well as a student of Thales (Thilly, 1931). He is from Miletus (present-day under Turkey) (Tantray and Khan, 2021; Evans, n.d.), and as a pre-Socratic philosopher, his ideas are deeply rooted in the Milesian school of philosophy. Ancient philosophers generally addressed world-centered problems. Some philosophers have sought to include life-centered problems in their discussions. However, an impartial analysis demonstrates that the materialist mentality of the ancient philosophers was crucial, as evidenced by Anaximander's philosophy, which expanded the domain of materialistic philosophy after Thales, the Greek philosopher, and the founder of the Milesian school (Burnet, 1920).

Anaximander's treatise *On Nature*, according to Thilly, was the first philosophical book as well as the first

literary work published in Greek (Thilly, 1931; Couprie, n.d.). Despite the loss of Anaximander's works, from the few pieces that remain, we can deduce that he believed the ultimate reality is Apeiron which is fundamentally everlasting, uncreated, infinite, and indestructible (Weber, 1905). According to Anaximander's thought the Apeiron produced the opposites that impacted the development of the universe, and everything is formed from Apeiron and ultimately destroyed by returning to Apeiron. Anaximander was also interested in geography, astronomy, and cosmology, as evidenced by his creation of maps of the globe and skies, as well as his introduction of the sun-dial into Greece (Burnet, 1920; Thilly, 1931; Russell, 1955; Couprie, n.d.) His ideas were innovative at the time, and they remain pertinent today in our knowledge of how things create and contribute to the development of the universe.

3. An Overview of Dialectic

Since the beginning of philosophy, dialectic has been employed to analyze and understand significant philosophical problems. The dialectic is a philosophical method that was originally developed by ancient philosophers (Jose, 1985). It involves the use of logic and reasoning to examine both sides of an argument or issue to conclude. It is also known as dialectics (Britannica, n.d.). It is an approach that has taken its place, indirectly or directly, in the discourses of philosophers and continues to have a profound influence on their thinking to this day. It has been employed in other domains, including philosophy, sociology, politics, and others, and since its institutionalization, it is also known as the dialectical method.

Dialectic is derived from the Greek word dialogue. The widespread use of the word dialogue in Greek philosophy is noteworthy. In the case of a problem, the method of finding a solution through question and answer was called dialogue by Greek philosophers. There is a state of dialectic between questions, answers, or counter-questions. There is also a sense of momentum in the process of solving this dialectic. Dialectic, momentum, and change, these are indicative of each other. Where there is dialectic, there is also motion (Karim, 2012). Dialectic, according to Matin, literally means discourse or discussion, or 'the art of reasoning or argumentation.' However, it generally refers to a certain type of reasoning in which reason advances by identifying contradictions in what has already been posited and eliminating or reconciling the contradictory ideas under a higher synthesis (Stace, 1920; Matin, 2006).

3.1 Form of Dialectic

Many philosophers use dialectic, as well as motion and change, as philosophical approaches in discussions of fundamental questions about life and the universe. In philosophy, there are often two types of dialectic discussed: Negative Dialectic and Positive Dialectic.

3.1.1 Negative Dialectic

Negative dialectic is the oldest philosophical method. This method is used to demonstrate the falsity of a belief by exposing any inconsistencies in that opinion and presenting reasons for and against it. According to Matin "Negative dialectic, in its general form, is a method of examining concepts and principles in order to clarify their meaning and assess their strength and weakness" (Matin, 2006, p.44). He thinks it may have a more specific goal of rejecting a theory by critical analysis, and hence it is referred to as analytic or destructive. Its goal is more negative than positive. As a result, it is a negative. He also believes that the approach is also positive in a sense because when anything is negative, its inverse is spontaneously posited (Matin, 2006). There are two additional forms of negative dialectic. Namely, Antinomy (The problem of opposing decisions) and the Socratic Method.

3.1.1.1 Antinomy (The problem of opposing decisions)

When conflicting decisions arise from the same logic, the problem of opposing decisions arises (Karim, 2012). According to Stace "An antinomy is a proof that, since two contradictory propositions equally follow from a given assumption, that assumption must be false" (1920, p.55). Antinomy, or the problem of opposing decisions, essentially occurs when two doctrines or conclusions based on equally valid premises contradict each other. Zeno, an ancient Greek philosopher, is credited with inventing this type of dialectic (Stace, 1920).

3.1.1.2 The Socratic Method

The Greek philosopher Socrates used this method to refute the doctrines of other philosophers, including his contemporary Sophists. In this method, he would prove the opinion untrue by giving any opinion for or against it, by constantly showing a latent contradiction between those opinions through questions and answers (Simon, 2015). This method followed by him is known in the history of philosophy as the Socratic method. Though Socrates introduced it, Plato, Berkeley, and Hume all employed it extensively in their philosophy (Matin, 2006).

3.1.2 Positive Dialectic

The positive dialectic approach refers to the coordination between the conflicts of two self-contradictions. The new issue that emerges through this adjustment becomes a new conflict, and again there is a new conflict of self-contradiction. Positive dialectic, according to Matin, is a method of reconciliation of contradictions (Matin, 2006). Positive dialectic is the process of constructing new ideas by reconciling contradictions that develop during the process. According to Islam, this procedure normally consists of three parts, the first of which is an abstract determination known as the thesis. This determination arises in a contradiction known as antithesis. These two symmetries are joined to form a third higher symmetry. This is referred to as synthesis (1999). This example would make it clearer, Parmenides said that the being is permanent (thesis); Heraclitus said that the being is variable (antithesis); And the atomists said that the entity is neither completely permanent nor variable (synthesis) (Islam, 1999). As a result of the new thought (synthesis), which occurs as a blend of thesis and antithesis, new contradictions (challenges and conflicts) emerge. These contradictions are reconciled with even the higher and newer synthesis, and this process is repeated until the broadest and most general concept of things is reached. G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), a German Idealist philosopher, is credited for greatly enhancing, modifying, and institutionalizing the positive dialectic. His dialectic is based on a triadic flow of thinking that comprises the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Hegel constructed his metaphysics based on his positive dialectic, which continues until the highest synthesis in the concept of 'Absolute Spirit' is reached (Matin, 2006).

4. Role of Dialectic in Anaximander's Philosophy

Anaximander's (610-546/45 BC) thought is deeply rooted in the Milesian school of philosophy, where philosophers used dialectic to explore and explain the fundamental problems of life and the world. Anaximander's philosophy is heavily reliant on dialectic. His Apeiron demonstrates the existence of dialectic in his philosophy, which allowed him to confront and question existing concepts to shape his philosophical ideas. Analyzing the core concepts of Anaximander's philosophy indicates that dialectic played a vital background role in his philosophy to work his notions appropriately in terms of interpretation and response to the fundamental problems and questions of life and the world.

4.1 Concept of Apeiron

Apeiron (ἄπειρον) is the ultimate core concept of Anaximander's materialist philosophy. It is a Greek term for anything that is "unlimited", "boundless", "infinite", or "indefinite" (Apeiron, n.d.; Couprie, n.d.). Apeiron is "the unlimited, indeterminate, and indefinite ground, origin, or primal principle of all matter postulated especially by Anaximander" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). He believed that the world began with Apeiron. According to Weber "...the apeiron, is indestructible, because it is uncreated" (Weber, 1905, p.23).

Thilly defines Anaximander's Apeiron as Boundless or Infinite. He says "...the Boundless or Infinite, conceived as an eternal, imperishable substance out of which all things are made and to which all things return" (Thilly, 1957, p.24). He believes that by this Anaximander meant a "boundless space-filling animate mass" (Thilly, 1957, p.24). Though Anaximander introduced this concept to explain philosophical problems and shape his philosophical ideas, he did not explicitly state its method or nature. Although it is clear from his exposition that Apeiron is an extremely energetic substance from which things are produced and returned, it appears that dialectic and energy, both negative and positive, as well as their combination, are important in his philosophy to effectively function his ideas.

4.2 Concept of Creation: The Original Fire and Steam

Anaximander's philosophy demonstrates that he believed in creation and held that the driving force is the original energy. According to him, the original energy is essentially a combination of hot and cold. He also believed that the sun, moon, and other planets and stars were created from the original fire. He maintained that the first steam was behind the formation of the sea, wind, and dry land. According to him, "In the beginning, the world was only steamy. The sea is the creation of steam. The remainder of the original steam has taken the form of wind and dry earth" (Karim, 2012, p.41). Anaximander argued "Everything created on earth, the sky, the air, the sea, the land, is the result of the eternal collision and dispersion of the original energy, hot and cold" (Karim, 2012, p.41). His discussion provides clear accounts about the dialectic, contradictions, collisions, and separations of hot, and cold in his philosophy.

According to Weber in Anaximander's philosophy, "The first opposition is that between the warm and dry, on the one hand, and the cold and moist, on the other hand; the former occurring in the earth, the latter in the heavens which surround it" (1905, p.22). Thilly argued that distinctive substances were separated because of the massive mass's infinite motion and that this process resulted in the separation of distinct components. He believes that

during the separation process, "...first the hot and then the cold, the hot surrounding the cold like a sphere of flame' occurred" (Thilly, 1957, p.25). Essentially, Anaximander's philosophy relates to an infinite motion at the base of the Apeiron. Russell's opinion on it is significant, as he stated, "There was an eternal motion, in the course of which was brought about the origin of the world" (Russell, 1955, p.47).

Hot and cold, dry, and moist have become extremely significant in Anaximander's philosophy. We all know that hot and cold, dry, and moist have opposite qualities. And the necessity for these opposed entities' collision, coordination, and action-reaction of the original energy to create other substances leads us to assume that he brought a dialectical method to his philosophy. However, indeed, he never expressed the demand to use this method under this name, even if it was required to function his ideas effectively, which is why it is not irrational to infer that dialectic was present in his philosophy and played a significant role, most likely as an underlining approach.

4.3 Concept of Evolution: The Origin of Animals

Anaximander's ideas regarding the origin of animals represent the beginning of the concept of evolution, and he appears to have an evolutionary mindset (Couprie and Pott, 2005). According to Weber, Anaximander believed that "The first animals were produced in the water, and from them the more advanced species gradually arose. Man sprang from the fish" (1905, p.22-23). Anaximander, according to Thilly, believed that "The first living beings arose out of the moist element. In the course of time, some of these creatures came out of the water upon the drier parts of the land, and adapted themselves to their new surroundings" (Thilly, 1957, p.25).

Humans, like other creatures, were once fish, according to Anaximander. However, there is no evidence that he has explained how other creatures, including humans, arrived at this stage. However, when Anaximander's philosophy requires the collision, the response to the collision of opposed objects with opposing characteristics, hot and cold, dry, and moist, when it requires separation for the creation of different substances, there is no doubt that his philosophy is distinguished by the dialectical character. Because it is natural not to address the question of separation if there is no dialectic between opposing themes. As a result, the phrase separation is extremely significant in Anaximander's philosophy. This is reinforced by Weber's comment that Anaximander believed "Everything that exist owes its being to the first principle, and arises from it by separation..." (1905, p.22).

5. Underlying Dialectic in Anaximander's Philosophy

The significant role of dialectic in Anaximander's philosophy cannot be overlooked. When it is asserted that there is infinite motion at the base of Apeiron to explain his philosophy, it is frequently alluding to dialectic. Because the phrases dialectic, contradictions, conflict, change, motion, transfer, separation, isolation, and so on are all symptomatic of one another. Even when there is dialectic, there is change and motion.

Anaximander likewise believed that to create something new, one must first return to the origin. According to him, there was an everlasting, indestructible substance from which everything comes and returns; a limitless supply from which the waste of existence is perpetually made good (Burnet, 1920). However, he provided no explanation or procedure for how it will return. To return to the origin of something, it must either be destroyed or undergo a process that is opposed to the process that brought it to this point; that is, if there is no dialectic (conflict, action-reaction, or contradiction), this phrase is meaningless. Thilly's opinion on this is also obvious, as he believed that there was "...an eternal, cyclical recurrence of the process of separation from and return to the primordial substance" (1957, p.25) in Anaximander's philosophy.

Additionally, Anaximander's philosophy advocates for change (Loubser, 2013). According to Weber Anaximander believed that individuals and species change constantly (1905). It is simple to deduce from this remark that Anaximander's philosophy essentially relates to the presence of dialectic by emphasizing separation and change. Although he has indicated a dialectic in the instance of hot-cold, dry-moist responses in the interpretation to shape his philosophical ideas, there is no clear explanation of the process by which these changes or separations occur. However, if we accept the conclusion that the periodic creation and development of everything was achieved by the temporary termination and coordination of the dialectic of hot and cold, dry, and moist, then it does not appear that injustice will be done to his philosophy. Consequently, we might conclude that dialectic played a significant role in Anaximander's philosophy. Though it was not explicitly stated, its existence was required for Anaximander's ideas to be successful, which is why this article concludes that dialectic was the key element of Anaximander's philosophy, which worked anonymously and can be called Underlying Dialectic.

6. Anaximander's Influence on Later Philosophers

Anaximander a pre-Socratic philosopher, is credited for introducing a new dimension to the philosophical explanation of fundamental problems of life and the world. His philosophical ideas had a profound influence on later philosophers, as it provided them with an understanding of the universe and its workings. Anaximander's ideas were revolutionary, as they presented a framework to explain the origin and evolution of the universe. His philosophy indirectly brought to light the concept of dialectic, which was a crucial part of his philosophy to explain and work effectively. His ideas also influenced other philosophers to delve further into natural phenomena including philosophy, astronomy, geography, and physics. This set the foundation for future advancements in these disciplines by other philosophers.

Heraclitus (c.540-c.480 BC), Parmenides (c. late 6th century - c. 5th century BC), Zeno (c. 495-c. 430 BC), Socrates (c. 470-399 BC), Plato (428/427-348/347 BC), Aristotle (384-322 BC), and many more philosophers throughout history employed dialectic, either directly or indirectly, in their interpretations of philosophy. Socrates' dialectic is known as the Socratic method in philosophy. "For Aristotle, dialectic is any rational inference based on probable premises" (Simon, 2015, p.104). Plato, however, criticized the use of sophists as a tool of deceit rather than uncovering the truth in their rhetoric since it is one type of dialectic (dialogue). The German idealist philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) (Knox, n.d.) is credited for greatly enhancing, modifying, institutionalizing, and utilizing the positive dialectic as a philosophical method namely the dialectical method in his philosophy. This method is widely used among post-Hegel philosophers, as seen by the philosophy of Karl Marx (1818-1883) (Feuer and McLellan, n.d.), a materialist philosopher, borrowed and freed this method from Hegel's idealism, and brought the materialist style into philosophical discourse.

7. Conclusion

Dialectic, a philosophical concept involving the act of reconciling competing ideas or viewpoints, has been utilized throughout history to explain and understand complicated circumstances and phenomena relating to life and the world. It has its roots in the works of Anaximander, one of the earliest Greek philosophers. Though he did not explicitly state how opposites for instance hot-cold, dry-moist reconciled in his philosophy, it is evident that it is necessary given the importance of separation, change, and motion in his ideas. In this article, we have explored how the Underlying Dialectic played a significant role in Anaximander's philosophy. Since it is not only necessary in Anaximander's philosophy to have dialectic to explain the process of creation and evolution of different substances, but it is also necessary because he believes that Apeiron has the quality of infinite motion and that everything originates from it and destroys in it, but how? To respond, his philosophy must apply dialectic or the dialectical method either directly or indirectly. This article explores that dialectic existed in Anaximander's philosophy, which may be called Underlying Dialectic. Essentially, Anaximander's philosophy had a significant influence on other philosophers, and the dialectic was visible in numerous of their philosophies, even having been established as a distinct philosophical method in the history of philosophy as well as in other disciplines. Dialectic, which focuses on reconciling opposing ideas or concerns via dialogue and debate. Through dialectic, we could better understand our thoughts, feelings as well as reality by seeing it from different perspectives. This has remained a key component of dialectic throughout its history.

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