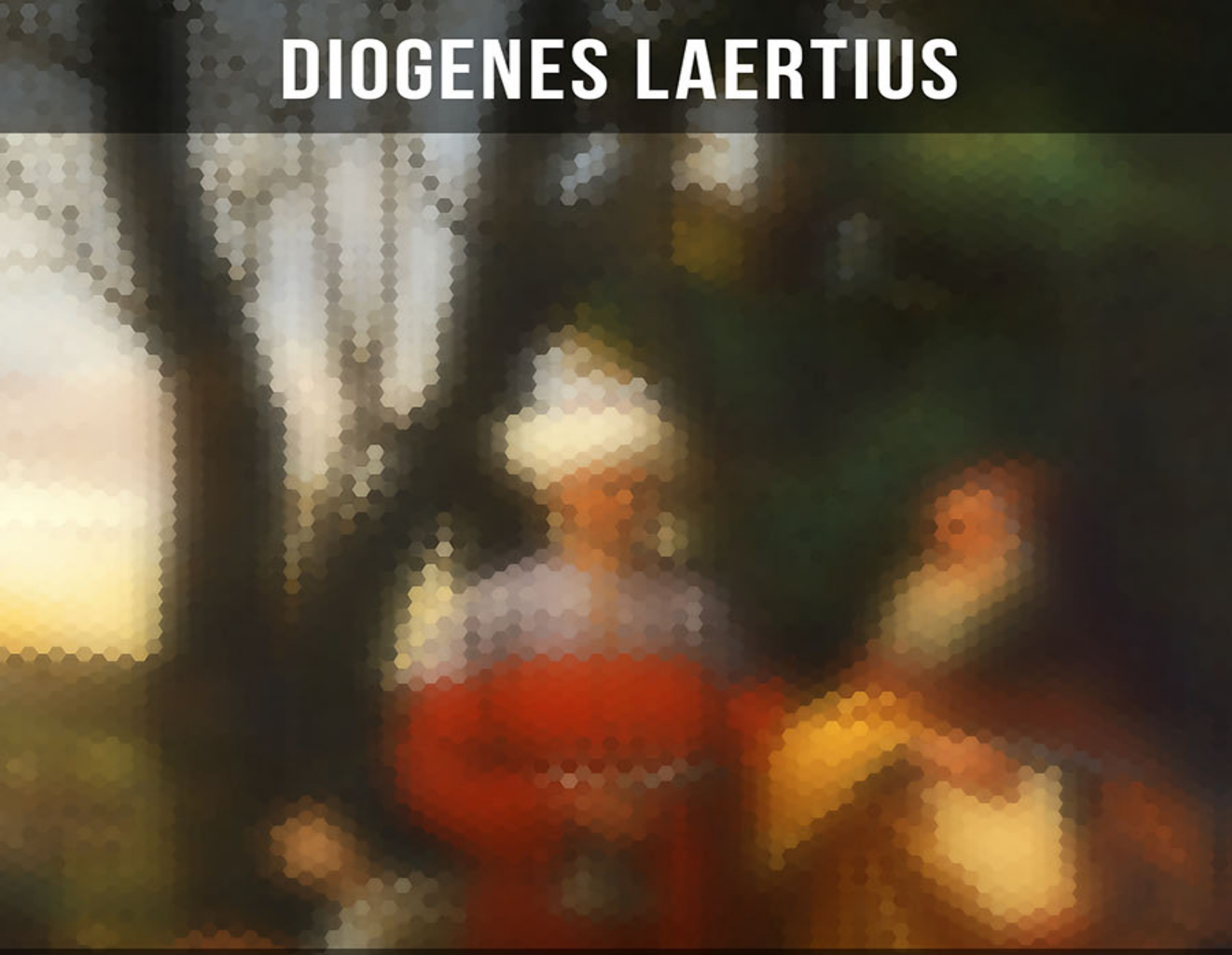
DIOGENES LAERTIUS



THE LIVES AND THEORIES OF EMINENT PHILOSOPHERS

Diogenes Laertius

The Lives and Theories of Eminent Philosophers

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Books

OK Publishing, 2020
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EAN 4064066396343

Table of Contents

PREFACE.

Table of Contents

Diogenes, the author of the following work, was a native (as is generally believed) of Laërte, in Cilicia, from which circumstance he derived the cognomen of Laërtius. Little is known of him personally, nor is even the age in which he lived very clearly ascertained. But as Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, and Saturninus are among the writers whom he quotes, he is generally believed to have lived near the end of the second century of our era: although some place him in the time of Alexander Severus, and others as late as Constantine. His work consists of ten books, variously called: The Lives of Philosophers, A History of Philosophy, and The Lives of Sophists. From internal evidence (iii. 47, 29), we learn that he wrote it for a noble lady (according to some, Arria; according to others, Julia, the Empress of Severus), who occupied herself with the study of philosophy, and especially of Plato.

Diogenes Laërtius divides the philosophy of the Greeks into the Ionic, beginning with Anaximander, and ending with Theophrastus (in which class, he includes the Socratic philosophy and all its various ramifications); and the Italian, beginning with Pythagoras, and ending with Epicurus, in which he includes the Eleatics, as also Heraclitus and the Sceptics. From the minute consideration which he devotes to Epicurus and his system, it has been supposed that he himself belonged to that school.

His work is the chief source of information we possess concerning the history of Greek philosophy, and is the foundation of nearly all the modern treatises on that subject; some of the most important of which are little more

than translations or amplifications of it. It is valuable, as containing a copious collection of anecdotes illustrative of the life and manners of the Greeks; but he has not always been very careful in his selection, and in some parts there is a confusion in his statements that makes them scarcely intelligible. These faults have led some critics to consider the work as it now exists merely a mutilated abridgment of the original. Breslæus, who in the thirteenth century, wrote a Treatise on the Lives and Manners of the Philosophers, quotes many anecdotes and sayings, which seem to be derived from Diogenes, but which are not to be found in our present text; whence Schneider concludes that he had a very different and far more complete copy than has come down to us.

The text used in the following translation is chiefly that of Huebner, as published at Leipsic, A.D. 1828.

LIVES AND OPINIONS OF EMINENT PHILOSOPHERS.

Table of Contents

BOOK I.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.

Table of Contents

I. Some say that the study of philosophy originated with the barbarians. In that among the Persians there existed the Magi,[1] and among the Babylonians or Assyrians the Chaldæi,[2] among the Indians the Gymnosophistæ,[3] and among the Celts and Gauls men who were called Druids[4] and Semnothei, as Aristotle relates in his book on Magic, and Sotion in the twenty-third book of his Succession of Philosophers. Besides those men there were the Phœnician Ochus, the Thracian Zamolxis,[5] and the Libyan Atlas. For the Egyptians say that Vulcan was the son of Nilus, and that he was the author of philosophy, in which those who were especially eminent were called his priests and prophets.

II. From his age to that of Alexander, king of the Macedonians were forty-eight thousand eight hundred and sixty-three years, and during this time there were three hundred and seventy-three eclipses of the sun, and eight hundred and thirty-two eclipses of the moon.

Again, from the time of the Magi, the first of whom was Zoroaster the Persian, to that of the fall of Troy, Hermodorus the Platonic philosopher, in his treatise on Mathematics, calculates that fifteen thousand years elapsed. But Xanthus the Lydian says that the passage of the Hellespont by Xerxes took place six thousand years after the time of Zoroaster,[6] and that after him there was a regular

succession of Magi under the names of Ostanes and Astrampsychos and Gobryas and Pazatas, until the destruction of the Persian empire by Alexander.

III. But those who say this, ignorantly impute to the barbarians the merits of the Greeks, from whom not only all philosophy, but even the whole human race in reality originated. For Musæus was born among the Athenians, and Linus among the Thebans; and they say that the former, who was the son of Eumolpus, was the first person who taught the system of the genealogy of the gods, and who invented the spheres; and that he taught that all things originated in one thing, and when dissolved returned to that same thing; and that he died at Phalerum, and that this epitaph was inscribed on his tomb:—

> Phalerum’s soil beneath this tomb contains
> Musæus dead, Eumolpus’ darling son.

And it is from the father of Musæus that the family called Eumolpidæ among the Athenians derive their name. They say too that Linus was the son of Mercury and the Muse Urania; and that he invented a system of Cosmogony, and of the motions of the sun and moon, and of the generation of animals and fruits; and the following is the beginning of his poem,

> There was a time when all the present world
> Uprose at once.

From which Anaxagoras derived his theory, when he said that all things had been produced at the same time, and that then intellect had come and arranged them all in order.

They say, moreover, that Linus died in Eubœa, having been shot with an arrow by Apollo, and that this epitaph was set over him:—

The Theban Linus sleeps beneath this ground,
Urania’s son with fairest garlands crown’d.

IV. And thus did philosophy arise among the Greeks, and indeed its very name shows that it has no connection with the barbarians. But those who attribute its origin to them, introduce Orpheus the Thracian, and say that he was a philosopher, and the most ancient one of all. But if one ought to call a man who has said such things about the gods as he has said, a philosopher, I do not know what name one ought to give to him who has not scrupled to attribute all sorts of human feelings to the gods, and even such discreditable actions as are but rarely spoken of among men; and tradition relates that he was murdered by women; [7] but there is an inscription at Dium in Macedonia, saying that he was killed by lightning, and it runs thus:—

Here the bard buried by the Muses lies,
The Thracian Orpheus of the golden lyre;
Whom mighty Jove, the Sovereign of the skies,
Removed from earth by his dread lightn’ng’s fire.

V. But they who say that philosophy had its rise among the barbarians, give also an account of the different systems prevailing among the various tribes. And they say that the Gymnosophists and the Druids philosophize, delivering their apophthegms in enigmatical language, bidding men worship the gods and do no evil, and practise manly virtue.

VI. Accordingly Clitarchus, in his twelfth book, says that the Gymnosophists despise death, and that the Chaldæans study astronomy and the science of soothsaying—that the Magi occupy themselves about the service to be paid to the gods, and about sacrifices and prayers, as if they were the only people to whom the deities listen: and that they deliver accounts of the existence and generation of the gods,

saying that they are fire, and earth, and water; and they condemn the use of images, and above all things do they condemn those who say that the gods are male and female; they speak much of justice, and think it impious to destroy the bodies of the dead by fire; they allow men to marry their mothers or their daughters, as Sotion tells us in his twenty-third book; they study the arts of soothsaying and divination, and assert that the gods reveal their will to them by those sciences. They teach also that the air is full of phantoms, which, by emanation and a sort of evaporation, glide into the sight of those who have a clear perception; they forbid any extravagance of ornament, and the use of gold; their garments are white, their beds are made of leaves, and vegetables are their food, with cheese and coarse bread; they use a rush for a staff, the top of which they run into the cheese, and so taking up a piece of it they eat it. Of all kinds of magical divination they are ignorant, as Aristotle asserts in his book on Magic, and Dinon in the fifth book of his Histories. And this writer says, that the name of Zoroaster being interpreted means, a sacrifice to the stars; and Hermodorus makes the same statement. But Aristotle, in the first book of his Treatise on Philosophy, says, that the Magi are more ancient than the Egyptians; and that according to them there are two principles, a good demon and an evil demon, and that the name of the one is Jupiter or Oromasdes, and that of the other Pluto or Arimanius. And Hermippus gives the same account in the first book of his History of the Magi; and so does Eudoxus in his Period; and so does Theopompus in the eighth book of his History of the Affairs of Philip; and this last writer tells us also, that according to the Magi men will have a resurrection and be immortal, and that what exists now will exist hereafter under its own present name; and Eudemus of Rhodes coincides in this statement. But Hecatæus says, that according to their doctrines the gods also are beings who have been born. But Clearchus the Solensian, in his Treatise

on Education says, that the Gymnosophists are descendants of the Magi; and some say that the Jews also are derived from them. Moreover, those who have written on the subject of the Magi condemn Herodotus; for they say that Xerxes would never have shot arrows against the sun, or have put fetters on the sea, as both sun and sea have been handed down by the Magi as gods, but that it was quite consistent for Xerxes to destroy the images of the gods.

VII. The following is the account that authors give of the philosophy of the Egyptians, as bearing on the gods and on justice. They say that the first principle is matter; then that the four elements were formed out of matter and divided, and that some animals were created, and that the sun and moon are gods, of whom the former is called Osiris and the latter Isis, and they are symbolised under the names of beetles and dragons, and hawks, and other animals, as Manetho tells us in his abridged account of Natural Philosophy, and Hecatæus confirms the statement in the first book of his History of the Philosophy of the Egyptians. They also make images of the gods, and assign them temples because they do not know the form of God. They consider that the world had a beginning and will have an end, and that it is a sphere; they think that the stars are fire, and that it is by a combination of them that the things on earth are generated; that the moon is eclipsed when it falls into the shadow of the earth; that the soul is eternal and migratory; that rain is caused by the changes of the atmosphere; and they enter into other speculations on points of natural history, as Hecatæus and Aristagoras inform us.

They also have made laws about justice, which they attribute to Mercury, and they consider those animals which are useful to be gods. They claim to themselves the merit of having been the inventors of geometry, and astrology, and arithmetic. So much then for the subject of invention.

VIII. But Pythagoras was the first person who invented the term Philosophy, and who called himself a philosopher; when he was conversing at Sicyon with Leon, who was tyrant of the Sicyonians or of the Phliasians (as Heraclides Ponticus relates in the book which he wrote about a dead woman); for he said that no man ought to be called wise, but only God. For formerly what is now called philosophy (φιλοσοφία) was called wisdom (σοφία), and they who professed it were called wise men (σοφοὶ), as being endowed with great acuteness and accuracy of mind; but now he who embraces wisdom is called a philosopher (φιλόσοφος).

But the wise men were also called Sophists. And not only they, but poets also were called Sophists: as Cratinus in his Archilochi calls Homer and Hesiod, while praising them highly.

IX. Now these were they who were accounted wise men. Thales, Solon, Periander, Cleobulus, Chilo, Bias, Pittacus. To these men add Anacharsis the Scythian, Myson the Chenean, Pherecydes the Syrian, and Epimenides the Cretan; and some add, Pisistratus, the tyrant: These then are they who were called the wise men.

X. But of Philosophy there arose two schools. One derived from Anaximander, the other from Pythagoras. Now, Thales had been the preceptor of Anaximander, and Pherecydes of Pythagoras. And the one school was called the Ionian, because Thales, being an Ionian (for he was a native of Miletus), had been the tutor of Anaximander;—but the other was called the Italian from Pythagoras, because he spent the chief part of his life in Italy. And the Ionic school ends with Clitomachus, and Chrysippus, and Theophrastus; and the Italian one with Epicurus; for Anaximander succeeded Thales, and he was succeeded again by Anaximenes, and he by Anaxagoras, and he by Archelaus, who was the master of

Socrates, who was the originator of moral philosophy. And he was the master of the sect of the Socratic philosophers, and of Plato, who was the founder of the old Academy; and Plato’s pupils were Speusippus and Xenocrates; and Polemo was the pupil of Xenocrates, and Crantor and Crates of Polemo. Crates again was the master of Arcesilaus, the founder of the Middle Academy, and his pupil was Lacydes, who gave the new Academy its distinctive principles. His pupil was Carneades, and he in his turn was the master of Clitomachus. And this school ends in this way with Clitomachus and Chrysippus.

Antisthenes was the pupil of Socrates, and the master of Diogenes the Cynic; and the pupil of Diogenes was Crates the Theban; Zeno the Cittiæan was his; Cleanthes was his; Chrysippus was his. Again it ends with Theophrastus in the following manner:—

Aristotle was the pupil of Plato, Theophrastus the pupil of Aristotle; and in this way the Ionian school comes to an end.

Now the Italian school was carried on in this way. Pythagoras was the pupil of Pherecydes; his pupil was Telauges his son; he was the master of Xenophanes, and he of Parmenides; Parmenides of Zeno the Eleatic, he of Leucippus, he of Democritus: Democritus had many disciples, the most eminent of whom were Nausiphanes and Nausicydes, and they were the masters of Epicurus.

XI. Now, of Philosophers some were dogmatic, and others were inclined to suspend their opinions. By dogmatic, I mean those who explain their opinions about matters, as if they could be comprehended. By those who suspend their opinions, I mean those who give no positive judgment, thinking that these things cannot be comprehended. And the former class have left many memorials of themselves; but the others have never written a line; as for instance, according to some people, Socrates, and Stilpo, and

Philippus, and Menedemus, and Pyrrho, and Theodorus, and Carneades, and Bryson; and, as some people say, Pythagoras, and Aristo of Chios, except that he wrote a few letters. There are some men too who have written one work only, Melissus, Parmenides, and Anaxagoras; but Zeno wrote many works, Xenophanes still more; Democritus more, Aristotle more, Epicurus more, and Chrysippus more.

XII. Again, of philosophers some derived a surname from cities, as, the Elians, and Megaric sect, the Eretrians, and the Cyrenaics. Some from the places which they frequented, as the Academics and Stoics. Some from accidental circumstances, as the Peripatetics; or, from jests, as the Cynics. Some again from their dispositions, as the Eudæmonics; some from an opinion, as the Elenctic, and Analogical schools. Some from their masters, as the Socratic and Epicurean philosophers; and so on. The Natural Philosophers were so called from their study of nature; the Ethical philosophers from their investigation of questions of morals (περὶ τὰ ἔθη). The Dialecticians are they who devote themselves to quibbling on words.

XIII. Now there are three divisions of philosophy. Natural, Ethical, and Dialectic. Natural philosophy occupies itself about the world and the things in it; Ethical philosophy about life, and the things which concern us; Dialectics are conversant with the arguments by which both the others are supported.

Natural philosophy prevailed till the time of Archelaus; but after the time of Socrates, Ethical philosophy was predominant; and after the time of Zeno the Eleatic, Dialectic philosophy got the upper hand.

Ethical philosophy was subdivided into ten sects; the Academic, the Cyrenaic, the Elian, the Megaric, the Cynic, the Eretrian, the Dialectic, the Peripatetic, the Stoic, and the Epicurean. Of the old Academic school Plato was the

president; of the middle, Arcesilaus; and of the New, Lacydes:—the Cyrenaic school was founded by Aristippus the Cyrenian; the Elian, by Phædo, of Elis; the Megaric, by Euclid, of Megara; the Cynic, by Antisthenes, the Athenian; the Eretrian, by Menedemus, of Eretria; the Dialectic by Clitomachus, the Carthaginian; the Peripatetic, by Aristotle, the Stagirite; the Stoic, by Zeno, the Cittiæan; the Epicurean school derives its name from Epicurus, its founder.

But Hippobotus, in his Treatise on Sects, says that there are nine sects and schools: first, the Megaric; secondly, the Eretrian; thirdly, the Cyrenaic; fourthly, the Epicurean; fifthly, the Annicerean; sixthly, the Theodorean; seventhly, the sect of Zeno and the Stoics; eighthly, that of the Old Academy; and ninthly, the Peripatetic;—not counting either the Cynic, or the Eliac, or the Dialectic school. That also which is called the Pyrrhonean is repudiated by many writers, on account of the obscurity of its principles. But others consider that in some particulars it is a distinct sect, and in others not. For it does appear to be a sect—for what we call a sect, say they, is one which follows, or appears to follow, a principle which appears to it to be the true one; on which principle we correctly call the Sceptics a sect. But if by the name sect we understand those who incline to rules which are consistent with the principles which they profess, then the Pyrrhonean cannot be called a sect, for they have no rules or principles.

These, then, are the beginnings, these are the successive masters, these are the divisions, and schools of philosophy.

XIV. Moreover, it is not long ago, that a new Eclectic school was set up by Potamo, of Alexandria, who picked out of the doctrines of each school what pleased him most. And as he himself says, in his Elementary Instruction, he thinks that there are certain criteria of truth: first of all the faculty which judges, and this is the superior one; the other that

which is the foundation of the judgment, being a most exact appearance of the objects. And the first principles of everything he calls matter, and the agent, and the quality, and the place. For they show out of what, and by what, and how, and where anything is done. The end is that to which everything is referred; namely, a life made perfect with every virtue, not without the natural and external qualities of the body.

But we must now speak of the men themselves; and first of all about Thales.

LIFE OF THALES.

Table of Contents

I. Thales, then, as Herodotus and Duris and Democritus say, was the son of Euxamius and Cleobule; of the family of the Thelidæ, who are Phœnicians by descent, among the most noble of all the descendants of Cadmus and Agenor, as Plato testifies. And he was the first man to whom the name of Wise was given, when Damasius was Archon at Athens, in whose time also the seven wise men had that title given to them, as Demetrius Phalereus records in his Catalogue of the Archons. He was enrolled as a citizen at Miletus when he came thither with Neleus, who had been banished from Phœnicia; but a more common statement is that he was a native Milesian, of noble extraction.

II. After having been immersed in state affairs he applied himself to speculations in natural philosophy; though, as some people state, he left no writings behind him. For the book on Naval Astronomy, which is attributed to him is said in reality to be the work of Phocus the Samian. But Callimachus was aware that he was the discoverer of the Lesser Bear; for in his Iambics he speaks of him thus:

And, he, ’tis said, did first compute the stars
Which beam in Charles’s wain, and guide the bark
Of the Phœnician sailor o’er the sea.

According to others he wrote two books, and no more, about the solstice and the equinox; thinking that everything else was easily to be comprehended. According to other statements, he is said to have been the first who studied astronomy, and who foretold the eclipses and motions of the sun, as Eudemus relates in his history of the discoveries made in astronomy; on which account Xenophanes and Herodotus praise him greatly; and Heraclitus and Democritus confirm this statement.

III. Some again (one of whom is Chœrilus the poet) say that he was the first person who affirmed that the souls of men were immortal; and he was the first person, too, who discovered the path of the sun from one end of the ecliptic to the other: and who, as one account tells us, defined the magnitude of the sun as being seven hundred and twenty times as great as that of the moon. He was also the first person who called the last day of the month the thirtieth. And likewise the first to converse about natural philosophy, as some say. But Aristotle and Hippias say that he attributed souls also to lifeless things, forming his conjecture from the nature of the magnet, and of amber. And Pamphile relates that he, having learnt geometry from the Egyptians, was the first person to describe a right-angled triangle in a circle, and that he sacrificed an ox in honour of his discovery. But others, among whom is Apollodorus the calculator, say that it was Pythagoras who made this discovery. It was Thales also who carried to their greatest point of advancement the discoveries which Callimachus in his iambics says were first made by Euphebus the Phrygian, such as those of the scalene angle, and of the triangle, and of other things which

relate to investigations about lines. He seems also to have been a man of the greatest wisdom in political matters. For when Crœsus sent to the Milesians to invite them to an alliance, he prevented them from agreeing to it, which step of his, as Cyrus got the victory, proved the salvation of the city. But Clytus relates, as Heraclides assures us, that he was attached to a solitary and recluse life.

IV. Some assert that he was married, and that he had a son named Cibissus; others, on the contrary, say that he never had a wife, but that he adopted the son of his sister; and that once being asked why he did not himself become a father, he answered, that it was because he was fond of children. They say, too, that when his mother exhorted him to marry, he said, “No, by Jove, it is not yet time.” And afterwards, when he was past his youth, and she was again pressing him earnestly, he said, “It is no longer time.”

V. Hieronymus, of Rhodes, also tells us, in the second book of his Miscellaneous Memoranda, that when he was desirous to show that it was easy to get rich, he, foreseeing that there would be a great crop of olives, took some large plantations of olive trees, and so made a great deal of money.

VI. He asserted water to be the principle of all things, and that the world had life, and was full of dæmons: they say, too, that he was the original definer of the seasons of the year, and that it was he who divided the year into three hundred and sixty-five days. And he never had any teacher except during the time that he went to Egypt, and associated with the priests. Hieronymus also says that he measured the Pyramids: watching their shadow, and calculating when they were of the same size as that was. He lived with Thrasybulus the tyrant of Miletus, as we are informed by Minyas.

VII. Now it is known to every one what happened with respect to the tripod that was found by the fishermen and sent to the wise men by the people of the Milesians. For they say that some Ionian youths bought a cast of their net from some Milesian fishermen. And when the tripod was drawn up in the net there was a dispute about it; until the Milesians sent to Delphi: and the God gave them the following answer:—

> You ask about the tripod, to whom you shall present it;
> ’Tis for the wisest, I reply, that fortune surely meant it.

Accordingly they gave it to Thales, and he gave it to some one, who again handed it over to another, till it came to Solon. But he said that it was the God himself who was the first in wisdom; and so he sent it to Delphi. But Callimachus gives a different account of this in his Iambics, taking the tradition which he mentions from Leander the Milesian; for he says that a certain Arcadian of the name of Bathycles, when dying, left a goblet behind him with an injunction that it should be given to the first of the wise men. And it was given to Thales, and went the whole circle till it came back to Thales, on which he sent it to Apollo Didymæus, adding (according to Callimachus,) the following distich:—

> Thales, who’s twice received me as a prize,
> Gives me to him who rules the race of Neleus.

And the prose inscription runs thus:—

> Thales the son of Examius, a Milesian, offers this to Apollo Didymæus, having twice received it from the Greeks as the reward for virtue.

And the name of the son of Bathycles who carried the goblet about from one to the other, was Thyrion, as Eleusis

tells us in his History of Achilles. And Alexander the Myndian agrees with him in the ninth book of his Traditions. But Eudoxus of Cnidos, and Evanthes of Miletus, say that one of the friends of Crœsus received from the king a golden goblet, for the purpose of giving it to the wisest of the Greeks; and that he gave it to Thales, and that it came round to Chilo, and that he inquired of the God at Delphi who was wiser than himself; and that the God replied, Myson, whom we shall mention hereafter. (He is the man whom Eudoxus places among the seven wise men instead of Cleobulus; but Plato inserts his name instead of Periander.) The God accordingly made this reply concerning him:—

> I say that Myson, the Œtæan sage,
> The citizen of Chen, is wiser far
> In his deep mind than you.

The person who went to the temple to ask the question was Anacharsis; but again Dædacus, the Platonic philosopher, and Clearchus, state that the goblet was sent by Crœsus to Pittacus, and so was carried round to the different men. But Andron, in his book called The Tripod, says that the Argives offered the tripod as a prize for excellence to the wisest of the Greeks; and that Aristodemus, a Spartan, was judged to deserve it, but that he yielded the palm to Chilo; and Alcæus mentions Aristodemus in these lines:—

> And so they say Aristodemus once
> Uttered a truthful speech in noble Sparta:
> ’Tis money makes the man; and he who’s none,
> Is counted neither good nor honourable.

But some say that a vessel fully loaded was sent by Periander to Thrasybulus the tyrant of the Milesians; and that as the ship was wrecked in the sea, near the island of Cos, this tripod was afterwards found by some fishermen.

Phanodicus says that it was found in the sea near Athens, and so brought into the city; and then, after an assembly had been held to decide on the disposal, it was sent to Bias —and the reason why we will mention in our account of Bias. Others say that this goblet had been made by Vulcan, and presented by the Gods to Pelops, on his marriage; and that subsequently it came into the possession of Menelaus, and was taken away by Paris when he carried off Helen, and was thrown into the sea near Cos by her, as she said that it would become a cause of battle. And after some time, some of the citizens of Lebedos having bought a net, this tripod was brought up in it; and as they quarrelled with the fishermen about it, they went to Cos; and not being able to get the matter settled there, they laid it before the Milesians, as Miletus was their metropolis; and they sent ambassadors, who were treated with neglect, on which account they made war on the Coans; and after each side had met with many revolutions of fortune, an oracle directed that the tripod should be given to the wisest; and then both parties agreed that it belonged to Thales: and he, after it had gone the circuit of all the wise men, presented it to the Didymæan Apollo. Now, the assignation of the oracle was given to the Coans in the following words:—

> The war between the brave Ionian race
> And the proud Meropes will never cease,
> Till the rich golden tripod which the God,
> Its maker, cast beneath the briny waves,
> Is from your city sent, and justly given
> To that wise being who knows all present things,
> And all that’s past, and all that is to come.

And the reply given to the Milesians was—

> You ask about the tripod:

and so on, as I have related it before. And now we have said enough on this subject.

But Hermippus, in his Lives, refers to Thales what has been by some people reported of Socrates; for he recites that he used to say that he thanked fortune for three things:—first of all, that he had been born a man and not a beast; secondly, that he was a man and not a woman; and thirdly, that he was a Greek and not a barbarian.

VIII. It is said that once he was led out of his house by an old woman for the purpose of observing the stars, and he fell into a ditch and bewailed himself, on which the old woman said to him—"Do you, O Thales, who cannot see what is under your feet, think that you shall understand what is in heaven?" Timon also knew that he was an astronomer, and in his Silli he praises him, saying:—

Like Thales, wisest of the seven sages,
That great astronomer.

And Lobon of Argos, says, that which was written by him extends to about two hundred verses; and that the following inscription is engraved upon his statue:—

Miletus, fairest of Ionian cities,
Gave birth to Thales, great astronomer,
Wisest of mortals in all kinds of knowledge.

IX. And these are quoted as some of his lines:—

It is not many words that real wisdom proves;
Breathe rather one wise thought,
Select one worthy object,
So shall you best the endless prate of silly men reprove.
—

And the following are quoted as sayings of his:—“God is the most ancient of all things, for he had no birth: the world is the most beautiful of things, for it is the work of God: place is the greatest of things, for it contains all things: intellect is the swiftest of things, for it runs through everything: necessity is the strongest of things, for it rules everything: time is the wisest of things, for it finds out everything.”

He said also that there was no difference between life and death. “Why, then,” said some one to him, “do not you die?” “Because,” said he, “it does make no difference.” A man asked him which was made first, night or day, and he replied, “Night was made first by one day.” Another man asked him whether a man who did wrong, could escape the notice of the Gods. “No, not even if he thinks wrong,” said he. An adulterer inquired of him whether he should swear that he had not committed adultery. “Perjury,” said he, “is no worse than adultery.” When he was asked what was very difficult, he said, “To know one’s self.” And what was easy, “To advise another.” What was most pleasant? “To be successful.” To the question, “What is the divinity?” he replied, “That which has neither beginning nor end.” When asked what hard thing he had seen, he said, “An old man a tyrant.” When the question was put to him how a man might most easily endure misfortune, he said, “If he saw his enemies more unfortunate still.” When asked how men might live most virtuously and most justly, he said, “If we never do ourselves what we blame in others.” To the question, “Who was happy?” he made answer. “He who is healthy in his body, easy in his circumstances, and well-instructed as to his mind.” He said that men ought to remember those friends who were absent as well as those who were present, and not to care about adorning their faces, but to be beautified by their studies. “Do not,” said he, “get rich by evil actions, and let not any one ever be able to reproach you with speaking against those who

partake of your friendship. All the assistance that you give to your parents, the same you have a right to expect from your children.” He said that the reason of the Nile overflowing was, that its streams were beaten back by the Etesian winds blowing in a contrary direction.

X. Apollodorus, in his Chronicles, says, that Thales was born in the first year of the thirty-fifth Olympiad; and he died at the age of seventy-eight years, or according to the statement of Sosicrates, at the age of ninety, for he died in the fifty-eighth Olympiad, having lived in the time of Crœsus, to whom he promised that he would enable him to pass the Halys without a bridge, by turning the course of the river.

XI. There have also been other men of the name of Thales, as Demetrius of Magnesia says, in his Treatise on People and Things of the same name; of whom five are particularly mentioned, an orator of Calatia of a very affected style of eloquence; a painter of Sicyon, a great man; the third was one who lived in very ancient times, in the age of Homer and Hesiod and Lycurgus; the fourth is a man who is mentioned by Duris in his work on Painting; the fifth is a more modern person, of no great reputation, who is mentioned by Dionysius in his Criticisms.

XII. But this wise Thales died while present as a spectator at a gymnastic contest, being worn out with heat and thirst and weakness, for he was very old, and the following inscription was placed on his tomb:—

You see this tomb is small—but recollect,
The fame of Thales reaches to the skies.

I have also myself composed this epigram on him in the first book of my epigrams or poems in various metres:—

O mighty sun, our wisest Thales sat

Spectator of the games, when you did seize upon him;
But you were right to take him near yourself,
Now that his aged sight could scarcely reach to
heaven.

XIII. The apophthegm, “know yourself.” is his; though Antisthenes in his Successions, says that it belongs to Phemonoe, but that Chilo appropriated it as his own.

XIV. Now concerning the seven, (for it is well here to speak of them all together,) the following traditions are handed down. Damon the Cyrenæan, who wrote about the philosophers, reproaches them all, but most especially the seven. And Anaximenes says, that they all applied themselves to poetry. But Dicæarchus says, that they were neither wise men nor philosophers, but merely shrewd men, who had studied legislation. And Archetimus, the Syracusian, wrote an account of their having a meeting at the palace of Cypselus, at which he says that he himself was present. Ephorus says that they all except Thales met at the court of Crœsus. And some say that they also met at the Pandionium,[8] and at Corinth, and at Delphi. There is a good deal of disagreement between different writers with respect to their apophthegms, as the same one is attributed by them to various authors. For instance there is the epigram:—

Chilo, the Spartan sage, this sentence said:
Seek no excess—all timely things are good.

There is also a difference of opinion with respect to their number. Leander inserts in the number instead of Cleobulus and Myson, Leophantus Gorsias, a native of either Lebedos or Ephesus; and Epimenides, the Cretan; Plato, in his Protagoras, reckons Myson among them instead of Periander. And Ephorus mentions Anacharsis in the place of Myson; some also add Pythagoras to the number.

Dicæarchus speaks of four, as universally agreed upon, Thales, Bias, Pittacus, and Solon; and then enumerates six more, of whom we are to select three, namely, Aristodemus, Pamphilus, Chilo the Lacedæmonian, Cleobulus, Anacharsis, and Periander. Some add Acusilaus of Argos, the son of Cabas, or Scabras. But Hermippus, in his Treatise on the Wise Men says that there were altogether seventeen, out of whom different authors selected different individuals to make up the seven. These seventeen were Solon, Thales, Pittacus, Bias, Chilo, Myson, Cleobulus, Periander, Anacharsis, Acusilaus, Epimenides, Leophantus, Pherecydes, Aristodemus, Pythagoras, Lasus the son of Charmantides, or Sisymbrinus, or as Aristoxenus calls him the son of Chabrinus, a citizen of Hermione, and Anaxagoras. But Hippobotus in his Description of the Philosophers enumerates among them Orpheus, Linus, Solon, Periander, Anacharsis, Cleobulus, Myson, Thales, Bias, Pittacus, Epicharmus, and Pythagoras.

XV. The following letters are preserved as having been written by Thales:—

THALES TO PHERECYDES.

I hear that you are disposed, as no other Ionian has been, to discourse to the Greeks about divine things, and perhaps it will be wiser of you to reserve for your own friends what you write rather than to entrust it to any chance people, without any advantage. If therefore it is agreeable to you, I should be glad to become a pupil of yours as to the matters about which you write; and if you invite me I will come to you to Syros; for Solon the Athenian and I must be out of our senses if we sailed to Crete to investigate the history of that country, and to Egypt for the purpose of conferring with the priests and astronomers who are to be found there, and yet are unwilling to make a voyage to you; for Solon will come

too, if you will give him leave, for as you are fond of your present habitation you are not likely to come to Ionia, nor are you desirous of seeing strangers; but you rather, as I hope, devote yourself wholly to the occupation of writing. We, on the other hand, who write nothing, travel over all Greece and Asia.

THALES TO SOLON.

XVI. If you should leave Athens it appears to me that you would find a home at Miletus among the colonists of Athens more suitably than anywhere else, for here there are no annoyances of any kind. And if you are indignant because we Milesians are governed by a tyrant, (for you yourself hate all despotic rulers), still at all events you will find it pleasant to live with us for your companions. Bias has also written to invite you to Priene, and if you prefer taking up your abode in the city of the Prieneans, then we ourselves will come thither and settle near you.

LIFE OF SOLON.

Table of Contents

I. Solon the son of Execestides, a native of Salamis, was the first person who introduced among the Athenians, an ordinance for the lowering[9] of debts; for this was the name given to the release of the bodies and possessions of the debtors. For men used to borrow on the security of their own persons, and many became slaves in consequence of their inability to pay; and as seven talents were owed to him as a part of his paternal inheritance when he succeeded to it, he was the first person who made a composition with his debtors, and who exhorted the other men who had money owing to them to do likewise, and this ordinance was called