

# **Anaxagoras and Athenian Politics: Towards a Chronology**

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David Sider commenced his book, *The Fragments of Anaxagoras*, by observing that "More attention has been paid to the life of Anaxagoras than to that of any other presocratic" (Sider, 1981:1). True, a surprisingly large number of scholars has endeavoured to devise a chronology which is consistent with the ancient material. To my mind, none has been successful. Anaxagoras was associated with a number of the giants of philosophy, men who were of influence or dependence in the development of philosophy, so it is important towards the understanding of the history of science and philosophy that a chronology of Anaxagoras be established.

An epitaph to Anaxagoras, as recorded by Aelian, reads: "Here lies Anaxagoras. the man who went furthest towards the frontier of truth about the celestial world" (Aelian: 8.19).<sup>1</sup> This is reason enough to persevere with the chronology.

Many ancient commentators refer to Anaxagoras. Plato named him about fourteen times. and alluded to him on another five occasions, while Aristotle mentioned him over sixty times, but without the prolific Plutarch we would know very little about the chronology of Anaxagoras.

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1 Throughout this paper, I have followed the standard referencing method used for studies in classical topics. When referring to ancient sources the convention is to refer to passages cited by the established book number or book title, and paragraph number (as, for instance, in Aelian, Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch, or page number and line and column number (as, for instance, in Aristotle and Plato). This traditional form is used by all scholars who write about matters relating to ancient periods and who cite the primary sources. For abbreviations I follow *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (OCD).

The most detailed ancient chronological material is that of Diogenes Laertius:

Anaxagoras, [...] was a native of Clazomenae. [...] He is said to have been twenty years old at the invasion of Xerxes and to have lived seventy-two years. Apollodorus in his *chronology* says that he was born in the 70th Olympiad [500–497 B.C.], and died in the first year of the 88th Olympiad [428 B.C.]. He began to study philosophy at Athens in the archonship of Callias when he was twenty; Demetrius of Phalerum states this in his list of archons; and at Athens they say he remained for thirty years. [...] Of the trial of Anaxagoras different accounts are given. Sotion, in his *Succession of the Philosophers* says that he was indicted by Cleon on a charge of impiety, because he declared the sun to be a mass of red hot metal; that his pupil Pericles defended him, and he was fined five talents and banished. Satyrus, in his *Lives* says that the prosecutor was Thucydides, the opponent of Pericles, and the charge one of treasonable correspondence with Persia as well as of impiety: and that sentence of death was passed on Anaxagoras by default. [...] Hermippus in his *Lives* says that he was confined in the prison pending his execution; that Pericles came forward and asked the people whether they had any fault to find with him in his own public career; to which they replied that they had not. “Well,” he continued, “I am a pupil of Anaxagoras; do not then be carried away by slanders and put him to death. Let me prevail upon you to release him”. So he was released; but he could not brook the indignity he had suffered and committed suicide. Hieronymus in the second book of his *Scattered Notes* states that Pericles brought him to court so weak and wasted from illness that he owed his acquittal not so much to the merits of his case as to the sympathy of the judges (Diogenes Laertius: II.7–14).

Diogenes has mentioned a number of sources which vary dramatically from each other.

There is not one detail from that report which has not been disputed.

There is considerable, but not universal, agreement that Anaxagoras was born in Clazomenae, a Greek city-state in Ionia, in 500 B.C., and that he died in Lampsacus in 428 B.C. at the age of seventy-two. Zeller related a number of arguments for both earlier and later dates for the birth and death of Anaxagoras (Zeller, 1881:321, n. 3). I remain faithful to the

dates given by Diogenes: 500 B.C. for his birth, and 428 for his death, because they require less manipulation of other testimony than do alternative accounts.

The first question is, when did Anaxagoras go to Athens? When Cyrus subdued most of Ionia, including Clazomenae, in the middle of the sixth century, the population became Persian subjects. The testimony is that Anaxagoras was twenty years old when Xerxes invaded Greece in 480 B.C. (D.L. II.7). The dates of portentous events were used as markers to place historical facts in an associated period, but I think that the sense of the passage is that, at the age of twenty, Anaxagoras was a member of the Persian force. Other opinion is that the association is not relevant in that way, but there seems little reason why the sources should mention Anaxagoras with Xerxes if it did not mean that Anaxagoras was with the invading army.<sup>2</sup> There is no ancient evidence that directly states that he was with the Persian invaders, but the implication is strong, and we have the report that he began to study philosophy in Athens, aged twenty years. This implies that he was with the Persian force, and remained in Athens.

One may wonder why a member of the defeated force of Xerxes would choose to remain in Athens, so it is worth looking at the possible factors which persuaded Anaxagoras to do so.

The Athenians had proven themselves invincible against the power of Persia. The great victories of Marathon (490), Salamis (480), Plataea, and Mycale (479) would surely have inspired a spirit of confidence and euphoria. Until the invasion by Cyrus in 546, the cities of Western Ionia had been Greek. Anaxagoras was not an Athenian but he was a Greek, and it was probably being Greek in a Greek society that kept Anaxagoras in Athens,<sup>3</sup> whereas his future and fortunes in Persian Clazomenae might have been very uncertain.

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2 This point is also made by Burnet, 1930:254, n. 1.

3 It is likely that many Ionian Greeks chose to migrate to Greek cities rather than remain in Ionia as Persian citizens. Woodbury, 1981:307, wrote of a *diaspora*.

From Demetrius of Phalerum *ap.* Diogenes, we have the information that Anaxagoras began to study philosophy at Athens when he was twenty, during the archonship of Callias. This has been the cause of confusion and debate because, in 480, the archon was Calliades. This is an important point, but the problem “need cause no difficulty” because Callias “is simply an error” for Calliades.<sup>4</sup>

If we accept Demetrius’s report that Anaxagoras was born in the 70th Olympiad, as I think we should, and that he was in Athens when he was twenty years of age, we need to accept that he arrived during the archonship of Calliades in 480.

It is possible that Anaxagoras was banished twenty-four years later in 456 B.C. when Callias was archon and that it was through the similarity of the two names and the two events that the confusion arose. I will return to that point again later.

Anaxagoras introduced Ionian philosophy into Athens (Diels-Kranz: A7). It is recorded that Anaxagoras was an associate or pupil of Anaximenes (Strabo: XIV.36), the third of the Milesian philosophers. The dates do not allow that Anaxagoras could have heard Anaximenes, because the Milesian died before Anaxagoras was born. What we can accept is that Anaxagoras was a student of Milesian philosophy, especially that of Anaximenes.<sup>5</sup>

There has been some debate about whether Anaxagoras began to study or began to teach philosophy in 480 B.C. Zeller’s opinion is that, at the age of twenty, Anaxagoras was far too young to be teaching, but that he

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4 Calliades was commonly called Callias “‘for short’, just as Zeuxippus was currently known as Zeuxis, or as Philistides (as Plato calls him) is most often spoken of in Greek history as Philistus”; Taylor, 1917: 82, n.1. For the use of Callias instead of Calliades, see Burnet, 1930:251, n. 1; Guthrie, 1965:322. Damon of Oa seems to be the person referred to as Damonides of Oea by Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.* 27).

5 Part of his theory describes coming into being, mingling and separating, an hypothesis which can hardly have come from anyone excepting Anaximenes. It is probable that Anaxagoras learnt the Milesian philosophy while a youth at Clazomenae, but that his studies were interrupted by his service with the Persian forces.

commenced his study of philosophy then (Zeller, 1881:322, n. 3). However, Anaxagoras had already begun his study of philosophy, being a student of the philosophy of the Milesians. No Athenian philosopher is known before Anaxagoras, and one may be sure that this young man, bursting with the new explanations of natural phenomena, discussed them with his associates and soon began to teach them.

Because the life and times of Anaxagoras are closely associated with the fortunes and misfortunes of Pericles, it is necessary that Pericles and Athenian politics be brought into the discussion. Anaxagoras's indictment and possible trial also associate him with a number of other prominent figures who were influential in politics and philosophy. We will meet them in due course.

Pericles was born in 495, which means that he was only fifteen years old in 480 when Anaxagoras commenced his residency in Athens. From both his parents, Xanthippus and Agariste, Pericles was descended from distinguished families. In 481, when Pericles was fourteen years old, his father was ostracised. Because of the foreseen Eastern threat, he, along with a number of other exiles, was recalled soon afterwards, but it is certain that Pericles always remained conscious of the danger of possible ostracism, an ever-present threat which hung over citizens who had risen to prominence and power.

The ancient sources tell us that Pericles was tutored by the Athenian Damon of Ea and by Anaxagoras (Plutarch: *Per.* IV. 1–2). It is probable that it was from Damon that he gained his ethical values. It is not known when Anaxagoras began to tutor Pericles. Some people deny that there was a master-pupil relationship, but rather an association or friendship, during which Pericles was influenced by Anaxagorean views, but Isocrates, who was born a few years before Anaxagoras died, stated that Pericles studied under Anaxagoras (Isocrates: 235).<sup>6</sup> The Milesians gave no role in natural events to any god, and there was nothing supernatural

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6 Isocrates (436–338 B.C.) was an Athenian political commentator of considerable importance and reputation.

in the philosophy of Anaxagoras except for *nous*, or Mind, which Anaxagoras envisaged as the moving force and as a divine authority.<sup>7</sup>

Pericles first came to public notice in 472 when, at the age of twenty-three, he sponsored Aeschylus's play, *The Persians*, which won at the Dionysia. The play appealed to the populace, who could relive their early victory over the Persians. Sponsoring a play was a common enough method to gain notice, approval and support, and Aeschylus had fought with valour at Marathon, Artemisium and Salamis (Pausanias: I.XIV. 5). This war service, especially an association with the victory of Marathon, would have been an additional credential.

In 464, when he was thirty years old, Pericles was appointed general, and in the following years he pursued a military career.

The sources do not enlighten us about Anaxagoras's activities in the intervening years. No doubt, he would have been formulating his natural theory, and developing his hypotheses about matter, the heavens, and the notion of *nous*, or Mind, as the causal factor. Josephus tells us that philosophers such as "Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, the Stoics who succeeded him, and nearly all the philosophers [...] addressed their philosophy to the few, and did not venture to divulge their true beliefs to the masses who had their own preconceived opinions" (Josephus: *Against Apion*, II.168–69). The nickname, *Nous*, was attached to Anaxagoras (Plutarch: *Per.* IV; D.L. II.6), perhaps in derision, and this suggests that his theory of matter was known, but it is not possible to know by what year his theories became public knowledge. He probably retained his association and friendship with Pericles, and engaged in teaching the sons of the privileged.

In 469 Socrates was born. Anaxagoras was thirty-one years old and had been in Athens for eleven years. In *Parmenides*, Plato has Parmenides with Zeno, his pupil, attending the Great Panathenaea in Athens, and in conversation with Socrates. At the time, Parmenides was sixty-five, Zeno about forty, and Socrates still a very young man (Plato: *Prm.* 127). The year must

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7 See Guthrie, 1965:272–79.

have been about 450, by which time I believe Anaxagoras had departed Athens. Any association between Anaxagoras, Parmenides, and Zeno, must have been prior to that time or later, from about 444, the year in which he was supposed to have examined the one-horned ram which had been discovered on Pericles's country property. Anaxagoras was almost certainly associated with Euripides, probably with Protagoras, and with Empedocles.

Anaxagoras was a few years older than Empedocles who was his pupil, and with whom he pursued his study of natural philosophy (D.L. VIII. 56). However, the matter is uncertain, and modern opinion varies. O'Brien believes that Empedocles was probably influenced by Anaxagoras (O'Brien, 1968:113), while Burnet believes that Empedocles may have published his poem before Anaxagoras released his work, and that Anaxagoras was influenced by his slightly younger contemporary (Burnet, 1930:261). Archelaus, the pupil of Anaxagoras (D.L. II.16), was regarded as his successor and must have been a close associate.

In 469, or a year later, the Delian League, under the command of the Athenian Cimon, "humbled the Great King [Xerxes] himself, soundly defeating the Persian forces at the Battle of Eurymedon".<sup>8</sup> "Asia, from Caria to Pamphylia, was entirely cleared of Persian arms" (Plutarch: *Cim.* XII).

In the following year, 468–67, an event occurred which had a profound effect upon the Greeks. This was the fall of a meteor at Aegospotami, also known as Goat's River. This is on the Chersonese, almost opposite Lampsacus. The event was recorded on the Parian Marble,<sup>9</sup> and by a number of ancient writers (DK: A11).

This is how Pliny the Elder related the event:

The Greeks tell the story that Anaxagoras of Clazomenae was enabled by his knowledge of astronomical literature to prophesy that in a certain

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8 The most detailed accounts are provided by Plutarch: *Cim.* XII–XIII; and Diodorus Siculus: XI. 60–62. Thucydides: 1.100 gives very little.

9 The Marmor Parium or Parian Marble is an inscribed stele originating at Paros. It lists events and dates from 581–80 B.C. to 264–63 B.C., although it is now fragmentary. See OCD, s.v.

number of days a rock would fall from the sun and that this occurred in the day time in the Goat's River district of Thrace (the stone is still shown – it is of the size of a wagon-load and brown in colour), a comet also blazing in the nights at the same time (Pliny: II.LIX. 149).

Pliny clearly acknowledges that the phenomenon occurred, but is critical of the understanding “that the sun is itself a stone or ever had a stone inside it. [...] But it will not be doubted that stones do frequently fall”. Pliny explained that Anaxagoras was said to have prophesied the fall of a stone at Abydos, in “the middle of the century”, and also that there is a stone at Potidaea, the colony being established at that site on account of the stone. According to Pliny, the stones are objects of worship (Pliny: II. LIX–LX. 149–150).

Plutarch also provided an account of the stone of Aegospotami, and stated that it was held in reverence by the local people. However, he gave the so-called prediction a more sensible explanation, and did not have Anaxagoras actually predicting the event. “Anaxagoras is said to have predicted that if the heavenly bodies should be loosened by some slip or shake, one of them might be torn away, and might plunge and fall down to earth.” Plutarch added that the stone was vast in size, and “shown to this day by the locals, who hold it in reverence” (Plutarch: *Lys.* XII.1–2).

We can discount the stories that Anaxagoras prophesied the fall of even one meteor, let alone two but, clearly, the Greeks were much impressed by the fall of the Stone of Aegospotami. Anaxagoras would have been much excited, interested and intrigued by the event. He could have sought out people who could have described the Stone to him and, although there is no testimony that he visited Goat's River, I find it difficult to believe that he would not have undertaken the journey in order to examine the meteor. His declaration that the sun is a stone the size of the Peloponnese, implies that he was familiar with the Peloponnese and the Stone, and was able to compare the two bodies. We do not know the stage Anaxagoras had reached in developing his theories on nature, but examination of the Stone, and the understanding that it had fallen

from the sky would have re-enforced his theories about the heavenly bodies.

How openly the new doctrines were known or spoken about is not clear, but they would have been discussed privately by a few intellectuals and students of Anaxagoras and with Archelaus who was a student of Anaxagoras and who became, at a later date, the teacher of Socrates. We have seen that Anaxagoras associated with a number of well known philosophers so it is hard to accept that his rather radical views could long remain a secret.<sup>10</sup>

Athenian party politics were fierce and, to some extent, driven by family vengeance. Many worthwhile politicians were subjected to the process of ostracism, often on trumped up charges because they had become a threat to their opponents or were seen as threats to democracy.<sup>11</sup>

Enter Cimon, a member of a most noble family who, Aristotle informs us, was wealthy “on a regal scale” which Pericles could not match (Aristotle: *Ath. Pol.* XXVII). Deep enmity existed between the families of Cimon and Pericles.<sup>12</sup> Athenian history relates a fascinating web of party politics and of loyalties being cemented by appropriate marriages, and reasons a-plenty for continuing hostility and vengeance.

In his *Athenian Politics*, Aristotle expressed complimentary opinions of Cimon, Pericles and Thucydides, naming them as early leaders of the people, and observing that the “best statesmen at Athens, after those of early times, seem to have been Nicias, Thucydides [son of Melesias], and

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10 See Plutarch: *Nic.* XXIII.3, where it is written that Anaxagoras’s doctrine about the moon’s phases was not held in high repute, that it “was still under seal of secrecy, and made its way slowly among a few only”.

11 The examples of Miltiades, a hero of Marathon, and Aristides the Just, stand out. Ostracism is a fascinating topic, which cries out for investigation.

12 Miltiades, the father of Cimon, had been prosecuted by Xanthippus the father of Pericles. Pericles, also descended from a noble family, could boast an Olympic victor, Cylon, amongst his ancestors. Such an honour led also to political success and it was on the strength of Cylon’s victory that the family had risen to prominence.

Theramenes” (Aristotle: *Ath. Pol.* XXVIII). Thucydides had a long career, and was named amongst both the earlier and the later leaders. We will meet him again soon.

Cimon’s wealth enabled him to support needy citizens in order to garner support, and Pericles could not compete with such beneficence. Apart from his generosity, he was good natured while Pericles was seen as aloof and superior, and Cimon was admired as a military hero. Plutarch wrote that the “emulous ambition of [Pericles and Cimon] cut a deep gash in the state, and caused one section of it to be called the ‘Demos,’ or the *People*, and the other the ‘Oligoi,’ or the *Few*” (Plutarch: *Per.* XI).

With Cimon frequently absent on campaign, Pericles, “being now a man of power and espousing the cause of the populace” (Plutarch: *Cim.* XV), was able to instigate a number of reforms. He stripped the Areopagus of some of its powers, and introduced payment for the jurors. This is how Plutarch described the events: “what with festival-grants and jurors’ wages and other fees and largesses, he bribed the multitude by the wholesale, and used them in opposition to the Council of the Areopagus” (Plutarch: *Per.* IX). Aristotle believed this to be a “bid for popular favour to counterbalance the wealth of Cimon” (Aristotle: *Ath. Pol.* XXVII).

The introduction of payment enabled the common people to attend the courts. This was the cause of “deterioration in the character of the juries” because they were unfitted for their newly acquired responsibilities (Aristotle: *Ath. Pol.* XXVII).<sup>13</sup> Of course, the reforms were not entirely in Pericles’s favour because, while they ingratiated him with the *People*, they further antagonised those who opposed him.

There were many reasons for attacks against Pericles. Following the victory against the Persians in 469, Athens gained control of most of Aegean Greece. The Delian League became the Athenian Empire, but Pericles’s

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13 We see an example of this in the story of “the unlettered and utterly boorish fellow who voted for the ostracism of Aristides simply because he was tired of hearing him being called ‘Aristides The Just’” (Plutarch: *Aristides*, VII.6).

imperialism did not gain entire approval, in some instances being harshly oppressive.

Cimon was a statesman, more concerned with Greek unity than with Athenian supremacy.<sup>14</sup> The Athenians could not accept his attachment to the Spartans which “awakened the envy and hatred of his fellow citizens” (Plutarch: *Cim.* XVI.4). After the failure of the Messenian expedition which he led in 462, Cimon was ostracised in the following year.<sup>15</sup> Pericles was then the most powerful politician in Athens, and not yet thirty-five years old.

Enter Thucydides, son of Melesias, who was the brother-in-law of Cimon, having married his sister. He was “less of a warrior than Cimon, and more of a forensic speaker and statesman” (Plutarch: *Per.* XI.1). Following Cimon’s ostracism, he became leader of the aristocratic party, and a considerable force in Athenian politics. He was, “for a very long time a political antagonist of Pericles” (Plutarch: *Per.* VIII.4), that is, from this time until his ostracism in 443 and again on his return from his ten year exile. It is easy to understand his antagonism towards Pericles.

Three more particular events added to the public opposition against Pericles. In 454/53 the treasury was transferred to the Acropolis in Athens from the sacred island of Delos, an act described as “robbery” (Plutarch: *Per.* XII.I–2). The Athenians were defeated at Tanagra in 457, and the Egyptian campaign of 454 was a costly disaster, resulting in great loss of life.

The Athenians remembered the benefits of Cimon and the course of events favoured his cause (Plutarch: *Cim.* XVII. 5). Athens needed his abilities, and his loss by banishment was regretted. The decree for his return was proposed by Pericles, and he was recalled before the period

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14 Aristotle declared “that nearly everyone agrees that Nicias and Thucydides [son of Melesias] were not merely men of birth and character, but also statesmen, who ruled the state with paternal care” (*Ath. Pol.* 28).

15 Plutarch relates that, “laying hold of a trifling pretext, they ostracised him” (Plutarch: *Cim.* XVII.2).

of his exile had elapsed (Plutarch: *Cim.* XVII.5–6).<sup>16</sup>

In about 451 Cimon negotiated with Sparta to obtain the Five Years Peace (Plutarch: *Cim.* XVIII.1), but died not long afterwards, while besieging Citium in Cyprus (Plutarch: *Cim.* XIX.1). He had been a powerful figure in Athens for thirty years, and Pericles was now freed of his influence. Even so, Pericles was never without opponents. His part in Cimon's ostracism provided another reason for opposition against him, and his role in the return of Cimon from exile (Plutarch: *Per.* X) was seen as sheer political expediency.

Personal defects could be called upon to disparage a man who was thought to be too powerful. The poet, Ion, considered Pericles to be presumptuous and somewhat arrogant in manner (Plutarch: *Per.* V.3). He was called *squill-head*,<sup>17</sup> and likenesses of him have him wearing a helmet to cover the shape of his head, which was rather long and out of proportion (Plutarch: *Per.* III.2). Pericles's fine oratory was held against him, and there were many who resented his clever persuasiveness (Plutarch: *Per.* VIII.3). Any stick would do to beat Pericles.<sup>18</sup>

There was always someone wanting to see Pericles brought down, but charges would have required considerable support, and moves towards ostracism could backfire. However, there were other means by which Pericles could be embarrassed and damaged politically, and this was by maliciously charging his friends and associates.

Thucydides led an attack against Pericles's teacher and friend, Anaxagoras, the person who most influenced him (Plutarch: *Per.* IV. 3–V.2), and whom "Pericles extravagantly admired" (Plutarch: *Per.* V).

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16 Pericles signed the decree with his own hand (Plutarch: *Per.* X.3).

17 In the 420s, by which time Pericles was dead, Cratinus lampooned him for the pointed shape of his head, mocked him and called him squill-head, in *Thracian Women* (Plutarch: *Per.* XIII. 6), and *Nemesis* (Plutarch: *Per.* III.3–4).

18 Plato has Socrates praise Pericles as the most perfect orator of the time (Plato: *Phdr.* 269E), and Plutarch was quite extravagant in his praise of Pericles's oratory (Plutarch: *Per.* IV.5).

In addition, Anaxagoras was a Persian subject with advanced ideas which were seen as impious.

Here the story from Satyrus fits in with other events and political conditions: the charge was impiety and medism.<sup>19</sup> Satyrus *ap.* Diogenes Laertius (12–13) named Thucydides, the opponent of Pericles, as the prosecutor, the charge one of treasonable correspondence with Persia as well as of impiety. Sentence of death was passed on Anaxagoras by default.

Josephus wrote that Anaxagoras escaped by a few votes from being condemned to death by the citizens of Athens, because he maintained that the sun, which the Athenians held to be a god, was an incandescent mass (Josephus, *Against Apion*: II.265–66).

A feasible chronology which is consistent with the report of Satyrus is to have Anaxagoras charged during the period of Cimon's banishment. A reasonable supposition is to have Anaxagoras charged in 456 B.C. when Callias was archon, and this might resolve the confusion over the names of the archons, Callias and Calliades. This dating is prior to the Egyptian disaster, but there were, as we have already seen, sufficient reasons to justify attacking Pericles.

There was ample justification for charging Anaxagoras with impiety. It is appropriate now to mention Socrates and Anaxagoras's book because, contrary to most opinion, I suggest that the charges made against Anaxagoras by Thucydides may have had no connection at all with the time when Socrates heard Anaxagoras's book being read.

Much has been made of the passages from Plato where Socrates is made to refer to the hypotheses of Anaxagoras. Socrates was defending himself against the accusations of impiety and of corrupting the youth. Meletus was the chief prosecutor. Socrates is speaking:

Do you suggest that I do not believe that the sun and the moon are gods, as is the general belief of mankind? [...] Do you imagine that you are prosecuting Anaxagoras, my dear Meletus? Have you so poor an opinion of these gentlemen, and do you assume them to be so illiterate as not to know

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19 These details are taken from D.L. II. 7–14, quoted at the beginning of this paper.

that the writings of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae are full of theories like these? And do you seriously suggest that it is from me that the young get these ideas, when they can buy them on occasion in the market place for a drachma at most [...]? (Plato: *Ap.* 26D).

Then in *Phaedo*, Plato has Socrates in discussion with Cebes:

When I was young, Cebes, I was tremendously eager for the kind of wisdom which they call investigation of nature. I thought it was a glorious thing to know the cause of everything, [...] Then one day I heard a man reading from a book, as he said, by Anaxagoras, that it is the mind that arranges and causes all things. I was pleased with this theory of cause, and it seemed to me to be somehow right that the mind should be the cause of all things, [...] I was delighted to think that I had found in Anaxagoras a teacher of the cause of things quite to my mind, [...] I prized my hopes very highly, and I seized the books very eagerly. [...] My glorious hope, my friend, was quickly snatched away from me. [...] I saw that the man made no use of intelligence and did not assign any real causes for the ordering of things, but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other absurdities. [...] After this, [I gave up] investigating realities [...] (Plato: *Phd.* 96A–99D).

Plato had Socrates rebuff the absurd ideas of Anaxagoras, but the question is, at what age did Socrates hear the book by Anaxagoras being read? The difficulty arises in the word “nevo”, which may be translated as “young, youthful (of children, youths, and men at least as old as thirty)”.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps one should not be insistent about Plato’s intention, but the ancient sources do suggest that Socrates was a youth, in our present understanding of the word,<sup>21</sup> when he heard the reading of Anaxagoras’s book. Within the meaning of the Greek word, “nevo”, Socrates was still

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20 In *Gorgias* (510D), Plato uses the word as “earliest youth”, and (in 463E) as “young and fresh”, in *The Republic* (378A) as “thoughtless young persons”. Aristotle uses the word in relation to children (*Pol.* 1340 b29), and in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1103 b24) in relation to acquiring habits from our very youth.

21 In modern understanding, we would speak of a young man up to that same age. For example, should we hear of a man of, say thirty, who was accidentally killed, our response might be to say, “and he was such a young man”.

a young man until 439 B.C. when he turned thirty.

When Socrates asked, “Do you seriously suggest that it is from me that the young get these ideas when they can buy them on occasion in the market place for a drachma at most?”, he was seventy years old. The reading may have been as late as 439 when Socrates would have been thirty, and in 399, during his trial, he could have spoken of himself as being a young man forty years earlier. “The limits of age within which a man may be called ‘nevo’, will be relative to the particular circumstances” (Ritchie, 1964:357–58).

The fact that Plato never has Socrates meet Anaxagoras in any of his dialogues has caused much comment. However, I think that, by 451 when Socrates turned eighteen, Anaxagoras would have been resident in Lampsacus for a number of years, having been charged by Thucydides during the exile of Cimon, as I suggested. If Socrates and Anaxagoras, the two great philosophers of the time, had ever met, Plato would surely have said so, and he had particular opportunities to mention an association in *Apology* and *Phaedo*.

To recapitulate the point: It is unlikely that Socrates was less than eighteen when he heard the reading of the book in the market place. This was not before 451, and I think that Anaxagoras was no longer resident in Athens. Further, I think that the date when Socrates heard the book of Anaxagoras is not relevant to the charge made by Thucydides.

Now to the charge of correspondence with Persia, and here we meet Themistocles (528–462 B.C.). He was the archon in 492. Plutarch says that “[Themistocles] was a young man” (Plutarch: *Them.* III.3) when he was a general at Marathon in 490, but the young man, “nevo”, would have been thirty-eight. Themistocles was convinced that, even after the glorious victory of Marathon, the threat from the Persians remained, and was able to persuade the Athenians to use the revenue from the silver mines at Laurium to build a hundred triremes. This ensured the victory at Salamis in 480, and he was instrumental in completing the fortification of both Athens and Piraeus (Plutarch: *Them.* XIX.1–2).

Athenian gratitude could be short lived and, although Themistocles

was on good terms with the common folk (Plutarch: *Them.* III.4), he fell out of favour with the ruling parties,<sup>22</sup> and was indicted on the grounds of medism<sup>23</sup> (Plutarch: *Them.* XXIII.3), which was treason. He fled from Greece, and found sanctuary in Asia, most of which was then under the control of the Mede.<sup>24</sup>

An interesting snippet tells us that Themistocles was a pupil of Anaxagoras (Stesimbrotus *ap.* Plutarch: *Them.* II.3). Here we find a connection between Anaxagoras and Themistocles, who had transferred his allegiance to the Persians. It is feasible to suggest that there was correspondence between Anaxagoras the teacher, and Themistocles his pupil. In 462 when Themistocles died,<sup>25</sup> Anaxagoras was thirty-eight years old. If Themistocles had an interest in natural science, it was probably with Anaxagoras that he pursued his interest. However, perhaps we should not read too much into the statement from Stesimbrotus. An association between the two men, Anaxagoras who was, after all, a Persian subject, and Themistocles the turncoat, may have been enough to spark a rumour, and perhaps sufficient to instigate charges of medism against Anaxagoras.

The story from Josephus is that Anaxagoras escaped by only a few votes from being condemned to death because of his impiety. The testimony is that he retired to Lampsacus, a city on the southern shore of

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22 He was of lowly birth from an obscure family, and he was an alien, his mother being either Thracian or Carian (Plutarch: *Them.* I.1). In about 472 he was ostracised and retired to Argos. However he was alleged to have been involved with the treacherous Pausanias and, whatever the truth may be, the Athenians moved for his indictment on the grounds of medism (Plutarch: *Them.* XXIII.3). See the following note.

23 Medism may be defined as loyalty or association with the Medes. Strictly defined, Media was the land between and bordering the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. During the period under discussion, Media was part of the Persian Empire.

24 Eventually, so the stories say, King Artaxerxes I appointed him to the governorship of Magnesia-ad-Maeandrum, and he was given Magnesia, Lampsacus and Myus for his upkeep (Plutarch: *Them.* XXIX). Strabo (13.1.1) said that Xerxes gave Lampsacus to Themistocles to supply him with wine, but this would have been Artaxerxes, as Thucydides testifies (1.137). All these cities were still Persian possessions.

25 He died "of either sickness or suicide" (Plutarch: *Thuc.* 1.138).

the Dardanelles which remained under Persian control.

There are many reasons why Lampsacus could have appealed to Anaxagoras. It was a prosperous city<sup>26</sup> which held a strategic position on a narrow section of the Hellespont. The inhabitants might have welcomed an illustrious philosopher, especially one who had been banished by the Athenians, and was interested in the meteor at Goat's River. The traditional belief was that the heavenly bodies were gods, but did this piece of material which had fallen from the sky comply with the traditional idea of the composition of gods? The meteor must have been seen as an indication that something very odd was happening in the heavens, and Anaxagoras had a scientific explanation that could account for the event without resorting to godly intervention.

Anaxagoras lived at Lampsacus until 428, dying at age seventy-two, sufficiently long to establish a school of philosophy which had a number of notable members.<sup>27</sup> He was awarded great honours after his death.<sup>28</sup> Aristotle reported that was given a public burial (Aristotle: *Rh.* 1398 b14; D.L. 11.15), adding the rider, "although he was an alien". He

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26 Lampsacus became prosperous through its tunny fishing and its wines. We can gauge its prosperity from the report that it paid twelve talents in tribute to the Delian league, compared with the six levied on Clazomenae. Strabo said that Lampsacus is opposite the small town, Calliopolis, passage across the Dardanelles being no more than forty stadia (Strabo: 13.1.18), which is almost 7.7 kilometres. A stade is 192.25 metres, one length of the Stadium, the course for the foot-race at the Ancient Olympic Games at Olympia: Spyros Photinos, *Olympia: Brief History and Complete Guide*, Athens: 1972, 8. It was no great distance from Goat's River where the meteor had fallen in 468, a detail which may, or may not, be of relevance.

27 These include Charon the historian of Lampsacus, Anaximenes the rhetorician, and Metrodorus the friend of Anaxagoras (D.L. II.11). Of that trio, only Charon could have known Anaxagoras. As Metrodorus of Lampsacus was born in about 330 B.C. he cannot have known Anaxagoras.

28 Anaxagoras had requested that the school children [boys] of Lampsacus should be granted an annual holiday in remembrance of him (D.L. II.15; DK, A1), and Diogenes says that this was still kept up when he was writing, which was probably the third century A.D.

was honoured by the inhabitants of Clazomenae, who imprinted their coinage with his likeness (DK: A27). Aelian and Diogenes recorded similar epitaphs about his search for truth (D.L. II. 15). As Anaxagoras was not native to Lampsacus, it would seem that his work in Lampsacus had extended over several years, otherwise it is not likely that he would have been so honoured. This would seem to defeat the claim that he went to Lampsacus late in life.

The chronology just discussed is beset with problems. There is the report of the one-horned ram which was brought to Pericles from his country property. Lampon, the seer, declared that it meant that of the two powerful parties, that of Pericles and that of Thucydides, the power would devolve upon Pericles. Anaxagoras, taking a more scientific view, examined the skull, and showed that a malformation was the cause of the deformity. After “a little while”, Thucydides was overthrown and Pericles was entrusted with the entire control of the interests of the people (Plutarch: *Per.* VI. 2–3). The date of the one-horned ram is taken to be 444, a year or so before Pericles secured the ostracism of Thucydides. The scientific nature of Anaxagoras’s diagnosis would have raised the antagonism of the seers, who would see it as undermining their credibility and authority.

According to the Marmor Parium, Anaxagoras was in Athens in about 442–1. This was the year in which Euripides won the prize for tragedy for the first time.<sup>29</sup> Socrates and Anaxagoras were in the audience (Marmor Parium, DK: A 4a).

The stories that Anaxagoras examined the one-horned ram, and attended Euripides’s play, testify to his presence in Athens during those times, perhaps continuously, perhaps for a number of short periods. I will return to this matter later.

In 442 or so, Anaxagoras would have observed the many changes in Athens which had occurred since his departure. The glorification of the Acropolis, that “most delightful adornment of Athens” (Plutarch:

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29 The play was probably *Rhesus* (Ritchie, 1964:357–8).

*Per.* XII.1), had commenced in 447. It was completed in 432 when the statue of Athena was installed. The work was financed by siphoning off an excessive amount of the tribute levied on the cities of the Empire, not for the protection and preservation of the Empire, but for the beautification of Athens. Plutarch wrote:

This more than all the public measures of Pericles, his enemies maligned and slandered. They cried out in the assemblies, “The people has lost its fair fame and is in ill repute because it has removed the public moneys of the Hellenes from Delos into its own keeping, [...]. And surely Hellas is insulted with a dire insult and manifestly subjected to tyranny, when she sees that, with her own enforced contributions for the war, we are gilding and bedizening our city, which, for all the world like a wanton woman, adds to her wardrobe precious stones and costly statues and temples worth the millions” (Plutarch: *Per.* XII. 1–2).

Pericles defended himself brilliantly against the charge, and his eloquence prevailed.<sup>30</sup>

During the exile of Thucydides, son of Melesias, Pericles had been the commanding force in Athens. Thucydides returned in about 434, and he and “his party kept denouncing Pericles for playing fast and loose with the public moneys and annihilating the revenues” (Plutarch: *Per.* XIV.1). Pericles was called upon to explain the alleged misuse of funds, and was held responsible for the alleged misappropriation of gold from the statue of Athena (Plutarch: *Per.* XIII.3).<sup>31</sup>

In about 432 B.C., or a year or two later,<sup>32</sup> a certain Diopieithes<sup>33</sup> brought in a bill providing for the impeachment of those “who did not

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30 The speech was preserved by Plutarch (*Per.* XII. 3–4).

31 As the commander of the building of the Parthenon, he was held responsible for the alleged misappropriation of gold from the statue of Athena (Plutarch: *Per.* XIII.3), by Pheidias, the superintendent of the Acropolis project (Plutarch: *Per.* XIII.4).

32 Other scholars assign varying dates ranging from 438 to 433. Mansfeld, 1980:17, allows 438–7; Schofield, 1980:35, and Guthrie, 1965:323, both ca. 433.

33 He has been described as a seer who was “chock full of ancient prophecies and reputed to be eminently wise in religious matters” (Plutarch: *Agessilaus*, III.3–4).

believe in the gods or who taught doctrines regarding the heavens, directing suspicion against Pericles by means of Anaxagoras” (Plutarch: *Per.* XXXII.1). It seems true to state that “the frantic voices of the ‘old-time religion’ now came fully into play” (Kagan, 1991:186). There was a terrible period of impeachments and ostracisms.<sup>34</sup> As Dodds points out, the victims whose names have been recorded were all “leaders of progressive thought in Athens” (Dodds, 1959:189).

I return to Sotion, who, according to Diogenes (D.L. II. 7–14), said that Anaxagoras “was indicted by Cleon on a charge of impiety, because he declared the sun to be a mass of red hot metal; that his pupil Pericles defended him, and [that] he was fined five talents and banished”. The earliest mention of Cleon in the ancient records is not until 430–31 when he attacked Pericles. At that time, Pericles was under considerable pressure. He was being mocked, and accused of cowardice, and would not call the assembly together, fearing that the people would oppose his decisions. In an effort to advance his own ambitions of leadership, Cleon harassed Pericles, taking advantage of the anger and opposition of the people, but Pericles “gently and silently underwent the ignominy and hatred” (Plutarch: *Per.* XXXIII.5–XXXIV. 1).

In his later years Pericles was beset with enormous problems and criticisms, in both his political and private life.<sup>35</sup> He was stripped of his command, was prosecuted, and fined. Three names are mentioned as public prosecutor, Cleon, Simmias, and Lacratides (Plutarch: *Per.* XXX V.4).

The charge which Cleon is reported to have brought against

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34 The names we know are, naturally, those of prominent people: Aspasia, Diagoras, Socrates, possibly Protagoras and Euripides. Protagoras’s first public reading of his book, *On the Gods*, was possibly in Euripides’s house (D.L. IX. 54), so it seems that they were associates. Protagoras was certainly agnostic, and probably atheistic. Apart from Euripides, all the prosecutions were successful and as we know, Socrates was executed.

35 (I) His son had involved him in a fraudulent financial matter. (II) In 430 B.C. plague was rife in Athens and the people blamed Pericles for the pestilence (Plutarch: *Per.* XXXIV.3–4). (III) The public was angered by the failure of the siege of Epidaurus.

Anaxagoras is, again, tailor made for a successful charge: Anaxagoras's cosmology would surely have been common knowledge and seen to be a threat against the state, especially during wartime. If Socrates speaks of himself as being a criminal because he was thought to be investigating things beneath the earth and above the heavens (Plato: *Apol.* 19B), Anaxagoras could be similarly labelled.

However, a great number of uncertainties surround Cleon's attack on Anaxagoras. They particularly involve the chronology of the events. In what order did the indictments occur? The order in which Pericles relates the events is that Aspasia, who will be mentioned again soon, was impeached on the grounds of impiety prior to Diopeithes's bill being approved (Plutarch: *Per.* XXXII.1). The story is that Pericles obtained her acquittal by weeping and pleading to the jury (Plutarch: *Per.* XXXII.3). If Pericles had pleaded for Aspasia in the manner in which it is reported, one wonders whether he would so soon afterwards again put himself in a vulnerable position by defending Anaxagoras. As Kagan remarked, "This was one challenge that Pericles did not dare meet head on" (Kagan, 1991:186).

According to Hermippus (D.L. II. 7–14), Anaxagoras was imprisoned awaiting execution when Pericles asked the people whether they had any fault to find with his own public career, intending to use his own good name as a reason to pardon his teacher. The answer, I believe, would have been a resounding "Yes". Perhaps in the years of Thucydides's exile in 443 following the death of Cimon, their answer could have been different, but the Samian War of 440 left Pericles open to criticism. Despite the final success of the expedition, the siege of Samos had been financially costly, with many casualties. By that time, Aspasia had been the mistress of Pericles for a number of years. As she was a Milesian, and Miletus and Samos were frequently at odds, it was believed that she had influenced Pericles into starting the Samian War and also the Peloponnesian War. She was regarded as immoral: it was considered that she procured women for the satisfaction of Pericles. Perhaps equally as important, she was a teacher of rhetoric, and it was said that she wrote Pericles's speeches. She

was intelligent, prominent, and a close associate of Socrates (Plutarch: *Per.* XXIV. 1–5). Apparently Pericles loved her very much.<sup>36</sup> She was a prime target.<sup>37</sup> The date of her impeachment is uncertain. Perhaps it was as early as 439, and was soon followed by charges against Anaxagoras.

We have Anaxagoras in Athens in 444, dissecting the one-horned ram, and two or three years later attending Euripides's victory, but how long did he remain? If he witnessed the impeachment of Aspasia, he would have been well advised to retreat again from Athens. This would give him about thirty-one years in Athens.

If we are to accommodate Hermippus's report (D.L. II.7–14), Anaxagoras was imprisoned awaiting execution when Pericles asked the people whether they had any fault to find with his own public career, intending to use his own good name as a reason to pardon his teacher. Hermippus has him being released, but committing suicide. If we abide by the general belief that Anaxagoras died in 428, this cannot be possible. Although Diogenes frequently cites Hermippus as a source, his reliability is open to doubt, and he should be treated with caution.<sup>38</sup> The story from Hieronymus is that Pericles brought Anaxagoras to court so weak and wasted from illness that he owed his acquittal not so much to the merits of his case as to the sympathy of the judges (D.L. II. 7–14).

Was Anaxagoras in Athens when the charge was made, or was he impeached in absentia? Was he fined 5 talents and banished? In *On Exile* (607), Plutarch has "Anaxagoras in prison busy with squaring the circle", that perennial problem.

And, indeed, was Anaxagoras charged on two occasions? Two pros-

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36 The fact that he kissed her when he left the house and on his return (Plutarch: *Per.* XXIV.4–6) would have been seen as excessive, and probably unseemly.

37 Later, in 425, she was cruelly parodied by Aristophanes in *The Anarchians*.

38 Hermippus had a penchant for the bizarre, and provided details of a number of strange, incredible, deaths of notable people.

ecutors have been named and two different dates for prosecutions against Anaxagoras have been considered. The fact that in the passage from Diogenes (D.L. II. 7–14) the indictment by Cleon is recounted before his report of the prosecution by Thucydides should not affect our chronology. If, indeed, there were two indictments, that by Thucydides was almost certainly prior to that of Cleon, and the latter was involved in the prosecution of Pericles following the failure of the siege of Epidaurus, which Pericles led. This was probably in 429. Pericles died soon afterwards, in the same year.

Now, Cleon may have been roused into a frenzy for prosecution as a result of Diopeithes's bill, and could well have been angered by the fact that Anaxagoras had escaped punishment earlier, as in the report of Satyrus *ap.* D.L. The charge by Cleon may have been made in absentia, because it is difficult to believe that Anaxagoras would have been so foolhardy as to remain in Athens during the period of prosecutions which followed the introduction of the bill of Diopeithes.<sup>39</sup>

A number of scholars have attempted to construct a chronology of Anaxagoras, but no one really knows the answers, although some write as though they do. The report from Diogenes would be easier to reconcile if the charge by Thucydides had appeared in the passage before that of Cleon. Complete reliance should not be placed on Plutarch. It is difficult to be certain of the course of the events which are reported, and the arrangement of the records from Diogenes is unsystematic and confusing. The whole question is beset by difficulties which are impossible of solution. The problem of the dates of Anaxagoras still awaits a solution which is feasible, but from our present collection of extant fragments, no solution which is in agreement with the ancient passages is possible. A number of years ago, when I first looked at the problem of the chronology of Anaxagoras, I had the naive expectation of being

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39 It is tempting to draw a comparison with Socrates who remained, and was executed.

able to solve the problem. Because the sources are vague, contradictory and lacking clarity, and dates are difficult or impossible to determine, I could not attain my aim. All I have been able to do is put forth another possible chronology, highlight other possibilities and bring forward a few points which have not previously been explored in full, or at all.

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