

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

CONCERNING WATER AS THE ARCHAI:
ACHELOIOS, THALES, AND THE ORIGIN OF PHILOSOPHY. A DISSERTATION
PROVIDING PHILOSOPHICAL, MYTHOLOGICAL, AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESPONSES TO THE NEO-MARXIANS

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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ABSTRACT:

This dissertation presents a new account of Thales based on the idea that Acheloios—a deity equated with water in the ancient Greek world and found in Miletos during Thales’ life—was the most important cultic deity influencing the thinker, profoundly shaping his philosophical worldview. In doing so, it also weighs in on the metaphysical and epistemological dichotomy that seemingly underlies *all* academia—the antithesis of the methodological postulate of Marxian dialectical materialism vis-à-vis the Platonic idea of fundamentally real transcendental forms. Unbeknownst to many philosophers, there are various Neo-Marxian scholars that position the origin of coinage as the pivotal technological development giving rise to impersonal “metaphysical cosmology,” suggesting that the value of money was more-or-less projected back onto the cosmos in the form of “ideal substances.” While the arguments are incredibly sophisticated and persuasive, their conclusions (either stated or implied) are rather difficult to swallow: the self is merely an illusion, abstract ideas of an ultimate source of value, like God or the Good, are totally delusional (as is the soul), and essentially everything is reducible to mankind’s enslavement to commodities and the notion of our own objectified labor (the true source of all value according to Marx). Not only is this a dangerous belief that many philosophers (consciously or unconsciously) have adopted, since essentially any action could be “justified,” it is also demonstrably false, since it rests on a thorough misunderstanding of Thales and misconception of philosophy as such.

My work rectifies that misunderstanding. In an important sense, it is an attempt at redefining philosophy as a “love of wisdom,” which I argue was accurate even in its Presocratic setting, and it uses the influence of Acheloios on Thales to do so. Throughout its pages I explore the etymology and historical uses of the word *φιλοσοφία*, examine the archaeological context of 7th to 6th century Miletos, consider various aquatic myths Thales encountered, and highlight a hitherto overlooked tradition stemming from Thales and influencing such thinkers as Pythagoras, Empedokles, and Hippo, which culminates in a completely new reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus*. It is there that we find Socrates and Phaedrus engaging in dialogue while surrounded by the iconography of Acheloios and the nymphs, all while they lie reclined like river gods (the sinews of Acheloios) on the banks of the Ilisos. And it is in that dialogue that Plato defines philosophy as a love of wisdom—the beholding of a multiplicity of hermeneutical frameworks—and alludes to the fact that it began with the sacrifice of Acheloios, the initial philosophical maneuver which he attributes to Thales. I end with a threefold rejoinder to the Neo-Marxian school, corresponding to the *λόγος*, *μῦθος*, and *ἔργον* of Acheloios. It turns out that, (1) the *λόγος* of Acheloios contained the ideal preconditions conducive to an abstraction to a more refined philosophical worldview in which water operated as the One among the Many; (2) the *μῦθος* of Acheloios actually encouraged the application of the notion of sacrifice to Acheloios himself (thus revealing his essence as divine water); and, (3), the *ἔργον* of Acheloios, in which he kneels in assent to sacrifice, is found on a coin that was probably designed by Thales himself. In the final analysis, I suggested we have recourse to Acheloios yet again, and reorient ourselves toward the *οὐσία ὄντως οὐσία*.

“But truly I shall speak without disguise, for my defeat, if rightly understood, should be my glory”

-Acheloios (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 9.1)¹

INTRODUCTION

Arguments concerning the ultimate principles of reality tend to take remarkable forms at different times throughout history. In one peculiar case some have maintained that all philosophical speculation has its origin in coins. Plato’s colorless, formless, and intangible Being (οὐσία ὅντως οὐσία), St. Thomas Aquinas’ *quod sit per se necessarium*, Kant’s synthetic *a priori*—all of it originates from stamped little globules of metal with specific markings. Indeed, many of the adherents to this theory consider such ideologies entirely delusional, and believe that universal forms and values that emerge from abstraction are complete fabrications on the part of man, with no independent ontological status. Fairly recently, the basic argument that coins caused philosophy was given tremendous force, specifically in Richard Seaford’s *Money and the Early Greek Mind*. Seaford’s argument, as compelling as it is, is essentially an argument for technological determinism, and one I disagree with on a variety of levels. The purpose of this dissertation is therefore twofold: on the one hand, it serves to refute the Neo-Marxian account of the origin of philosophy, an account which is rooted in the dialectical materialism of Marx himself. On the other hand, the refutation of the Neo-Marxian account will consist in establishing the undeniable relation of the cult of Acheloios and its surrounding mythos to the philosophy of Thales—that is the hard thesis, namely, that *philosophy was precipitated by abstractions from and engagement with the tradition of Acheloios, and truly begins with a particular insight into the notion of the sacrifice of Acheloios; this explanation incorporates much more evidence and*

¹ Acheloios speaking to Theseus, from Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, 9.1, translation Brookes More (Boston: Cornhill Publishing Co., 1922).

better explains the origin of philosophical activity when compared with the Neo-Marxian notion of exchange-abstraction.

The first chapter begins with an analysis of abstraction in the dialectical materialism of Marx. Marx proposed a theory in *Das Kapital* that the exchange-value of commodities, specifically abstract human labor, gave rise to all ideologies. However, he insisted that such ideologies were essentially like “optical illusions” that did not correspond to some objective reality outside the mind. Many therefore refer to Marx’s conceptual scheme under the banner of dialectical materialism. As a theory, dialectical (historical) materialism explains the superstructures of social reality and their material underpinnings in processes of production and consumption; but it also has an ontographic dimension, despite the fact that Marx does not participate in bourgeois philosophy. In this second sense, dialectical materialism implies, ontologically, that all reality is reduced to dialectical exchange in a thoroughly immanent, material world, and these ontological parameters have serious implications insofar as all transcendental forms and values are eliminated.

Upon this basis there are two early theories that argue the social use of coinage literally caused philosophy. These theories are found in the work of George Thomson and Alfred Sohn-Rethel. On the one hand, Thompson offers an important cultural critique of archaic coinage and Presocratic philosophy, and shines a light on the often-overlooked fact that philosophy and coinage emerge in nearly the same place at the same time. That is, electrum coinage, the very first coins in the world, emerged in the second half of the seventh century B.C.E. in the area of Ionia and Lydia, in the same half century that Thales was born, thus a generation or so before he began philosophizing. Thomson argues, largely following Marx, that the social exchange of money engendered abstract philosophical frameworks in the sense that the value of money was

reflected back onto the world via a “false consciousness,” and his historical survey is evidence of such a causal relation. But Thomson does not sufficiently discuss the inner workings or machinations that take place in the mind during the process in which exchange value undergoes some metamorphosis into something else, presumably because such philosophical discussion is counter to the Marxian methodological postulate. This gap is somewhat filled by Alfred Sohn-Rethel, sworn enemy of the looming technological takeover of mankind, who presents an abstract critique of epistemology in his discussion of how exchange-abstraction (*die Tauschabstraktion*) gives rise to philosophical frameworks, juxtaposing his view with Kant’s system of Transcendental Idealism. For Sohn-Rethel, instead of the mind projecting *a priori* categories onto the world, social interactions in the world (specifically, the exchange of coined money) change the mind in such a way that it can then project universal frameworks and values onto the world.

The second chapter of this dissertation examines Richard Seaford’s work, which, in a sense, combines and significantly expands upon the theories of Marx, Thomson, and Sohn-Rethel. Seaford argues, following his predecessors, that the absence of use-value in money (which he claims was fiduciary from the start) makes it an “ideal substance,” and this notion of ideal substance is then projected onto the cosmos by the Presocratics in their identification of various material candidates for the ἀρχή. For evidence, Seaford presents a tenfold scheme in which he compares coined money to Anaximander’s ἄπειρον. Briefly, he argues that both coinage and the ἄπειρον exhibit the following characteristics: (a) they are unlike all things and separate from them, yet (b) contain all things; (c) they precede and persist beyond all things; (d) they are eternally moving; (e) they surround and steer all things; (f) they are impersonal; (g) they are unlimited; (h) they are internally homogeneous; (i) they are imperceptible yet visible; and (j)

they unite opposites. Such a parallel, for Seaford, supports the idea that coinage engendered philosophical activity, which he defines as “metaphysical cosmology” consisting of “abstract ideas of the universe as an impersonal system.”

With this background, the first step in disputing what I call the Neo-Marxian school of exchange-abstraction is to point out some of its obvious shortcomings, which I do in Chapter 3. Here I begin by building upon a poignant critique from Joshua Reynolds. Reynold’s critique focuses on Seaford exclusively, and it is threefold. First, he claims that Seaford’s arguments are not philosophical in character insofar they do not engage with the doxographic tradition, hence Seaford is not doing philosophy (similar to Thomson). This is problematic since Seaford is not explaining the conscious thoughts of the Presocratics and focusing only on unconscious motivators. Secondly, Reynolds argues that there is an abundance of evidence that exhibits a pre-coinage distinction of sign and substance and folks must have understood this differentiation in order to trust in coinage. Accordingly, if signification to an underlying reality outside of appearances already existed, coinage might not have caused this abstraction leading to accounts of ultimate reality. Finally, Reynolds argues that Seaford’s account does not explain the actual cognitive processes at play in the origin of philosophy, and therefore charges that Seaford posits a *deus ex machina*—in other words, a contrived, single solution to a problem that requires a more multifaceted explanation.

But Reynolds’ critique is no nail in the coffin, and Seaford’s argument still has incredible strength. I therefore add additional critiques. First, I point out that Seaford’s argument is based too heavily on the Aristotelian tradition (specifically as interpreted through Theophrastus and Hegel), which many scholars have criticized because it employs anachronistic terminology when discussing archaic thinkers. In other words, Aristotle discusses his predecessors in terms that

emerged after many years of philosophical refinement, and were not the terms that Thales, Anaximander, and others used. How sure can we be, then, that Aristotle's assessment paints an accurate picture of the origin of philosophy? Not very, especially if we look at the surviving fragments of Anaximander and Xenophanes. On top of this, the more serious issue with Seaford's account, and likewise Thomson's and Sohn-Rethel's, is that they all almost completely ignore Thales. The rationale is that he is so obscure and the evidence so fragmentary that we cannot determine much. Conveniently, by ignoring Thales it allows the argument for exchange-abstraction to gain a much stronger foothold, since the ambiguity surrounding Thales is such that it is incommensurable with the precision of the exchange-abstraction paradigm, at least in Seaford's iteration of the coinage-ἄπειρον parallel. Moreover, by ignoring Thales the very definition of philosophy itself changes and begins with Anaximander's far more delineated ἄπειρον. Ultimately, I hope to show that philosophy is something other than what Seaford makes it out to be; that is to say, it is not simply the projection of "abstract ideas of the universe as an impersonal system," but, rather, an authentic *love* of wisdom that stems from beatific vision (the details of which are discussed in Chapters 12 and the Conclusion).

Having identified the core problems, I begin the investigation into an alternative that reestablishes Thales as the original philosopher. Thus, I turn to Thales and Acheloios quite generally in the next two chapters. The reason for presenting an initial, general overview of both figures is twofold. First, both figures are indeed relatively obscure, so before entertaining more advanced arguments it is useful to determine what we know and how we know it. Second, practically speaking, it will be easier to refer back to these essential characteristics when making more complex, sophisticated arguments, rather than having to veer off repeatedly to make certain points along the way.

Chapter 3 is therefore devoted entirely to Thales, and a summary of the recent scholarly assessments of his philosophy to date. In this section I will first review the ancient accounts of Thales' philosophy we can rely on for the larger thesis, and in this case we will see that it amounts to just three things: (1) water is the ἀρχή; (2) the Earth rests on water; and (3) all things are full of gods. All other elements of his philosophy are far too uncertain to rely upon at this initial stage and will not be given any attention—not because they are completely out of the realm of possibility, but because an accurate assessment of them would prove far too demanding here, and will be much easier to interpret after an examination of the Acheloios tradition. Moreover, in my estimation, their veracity or lack thereof does not impact the overall thesis. In any case, in this chapter we will see that it is erroneous (inconsistent and implausible) to think that Thales believed water was the *constitutive* cause of all things. For argumentation I primarily follow the work of Jaap Mansfield, Rhodes Pinto, and Dmitri Panchenko. Very briefly, each of these thinkers contributes the following: (1) Panchenko provides refutation of the strict three-fold “constitutive” ἀρχή by pointing to the twofold version in Anaximander and Xenophanes; (2) Mansfield points out that Aristotle emphasized Thales was the “founder” of this type of philosophy but that he did not express it in its entirety; and (3) Pinto, for his part, differentiates between water and soul and convincingly argues against the (unqualified) panpsychist accounts. Ultimately, moving away from ἀρχή as constitutive cause, which these three thinkers help accomplish, is essential because in doing so we move toward water in its “governing” role, as (I’ll argue) Thales envisioned it. This idea, of ἀρχή as “governing origin,” will be discussed throughout the final sections of this work and envisions the ἀρχή in a qualified threefold sense, as originating, underlying, and final principle that governs all things. (The idea of “governing

origin” is a concept originally coined by Prof. John Sallis in a lecture course on Nature in Greek Philosophy c. 2006).

In Chapter 4, I present an overview of Acheloios, based largely on my earlier works. Here we will see that Acheloios emerges from a widespread Orientalizing phenomenon in which itinerant mercenaries and seers collectively crystallized the mythos of Acheloios and formed a cultural *koine* spanning much of the Mediterranean that is reflected as early as Homer. All of these practices and related mythologies were largely filtered through earlier Near Eastern predecessors. Most importantly, Acheloios was equated with water and viewed in some important accounts as its ultimate source. This point, which has been overlooked in all discourses on Thales until now, is utterly essential. If Thales said that water was the ἀρχή, regardless of what he meant by ἀρχή, surely a deity equated with water is relevant to a discussion of the mythological and religious influences on Thales. And this equating of Acheloios and water is not cherry picked from one or two obscure passages examined in isolation, but rather comes from a robust, widely-held belief system exhibited in literature and cult. I follow the work of contemporary archaeologist and classicist Dr. Hans-Peter Isler, who expanded greatly upon the original theory of Nicola Ignarra (a remarkably brilliant, early 18th century scholar). The major ancient sources for this tradition are the earlier versions of Homer’s *Iliad* (advocated by both Megakleides and Zenodotus), fragments of Ephorus, the works of Euripides, Achaëus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes, the *Derveni Papyrus*, the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus*, Virgil, Servius, and Macrobius. Ultimately, Acheloios was widely viewed as the ultimate source and strength of water and the rivers of the world were seen as the “sinews of Acheloios” —both meanings, strength and sinews, contained in the Greek ἰς.

With these basic parameters set—an assessment and critique of the Neo-Marxian paradigm and a basic overview of both Thales and Acheloios—the real work of the dissertation begins, namely, demonstrating that Thales was influenced by the cult of Acheloios and its surrounding mythos.

In Chapter 5, I begin to forge the Acheloios-Thales connection by first examining the very word Thales appears to have used to identify the ἀρχή, namely, ὕδωρ. Here I look at its use in Homeric times and, as it turns out, it always refers to fresh water unless employing a very specific epithet (and then only in the *Odyssey* and very rarely). This is our first indication that we need to look beyond Okeanos in assessing the mythological and religious influences on Thales. In fact, it bodes well for Acheloios, who is often identified with fresh water in particular. I then turn to the etymology of ὕδωρ, specifically its roots in the Akkadian *edû* and *adû* and its distant cousin, the Sanskrit *udan*. In all cases we find consistency with the Greek. In other words, the Akkadian and Sanskrit equivalents of ὕδωρ also mean fresh, or pure, unadulterated water—water as such—and there is also invariably some divine or sacred association with it. In fact, this etymological investigation reveals why oaths are sworn over water even in the Greek world (which Ephorus, unlike Aristotle, ties directly to Acheloios). Thus, in this chapter we get our first glimpse that Thales was influenced by Acheloios because ὕδωρ also meant pure water, and it was an inherently sacred substance, indicative of the Dodonaean’s ubiquitous application of θεῶν.

Chapter 6 examines the archaeological evidence demonstrating that the cult of Acheloios was actually in Miletos during Thales’ life. The first objective is to determine when Thales lived. This is not easy, because what evidence there is is mostly unreliable. Still, Thales’ association with the eclipse of 585 B.C.E. indicates that, even though he might not have predicted it,

he had at least achieved great notoriety by this date, and therefore he must have been born in the second half of the seventh century B.C.E. Furthermore, because he is associated with the crossing of the Halys in 546 B.C.E., we know that, even if he was not instrumental in its crossing, he was said to be, and such a rumor would not have been “well known” if Thales was long dead at the time of the events. Thus Thales died sometime during or after 546 B.C.E.

Moving on from Thales’ dates, we examine several pieces of physical evidence that demonstrate Acheloios was known to the Milesians during Thales’ life: a unique electrum stater featuring Acheloios Meandros as a winged man-faced bull, three small electrum fractionals also featuring Acheloios, two pottery fragments excavated at Bezeran, a Milesian colony, both featuring Acheloios, and several aryballoi in the form of the head of Acheloios from Naukratis, another Milesian colony. I argue first that the coins must have been minted in Miletos, which was the general consensus among numismatists, since the known find spots of coins struck on this weight standard all come from an area in which Miletos is virtually dead center. Second, I date the stater to the mid 6th century B.C.E., following G. K. Jenkins and Colin Kraay. After discussing the stater, I argue that the appearance of Acheloios at the Milesian colonies of Bezeran and Naukratis and dating to first quarter of the sixth century B.C.E. or slightly later indicates the deity was worshipped in Miletos quite early, since the colonists did not encounter the iconography upon arrival (in Bezeran, at least). For Naukratis, I show that the presence of Acheloios at the shrine of Aphrodite is an indication of two things: (1) Acheloios was worshipped in cult in an area where Thales is known to have travelled (indeed, the Acheloios stater was found in Egypt); and (2) the Egyptian “prophets” Thales learned from may very well have been devotees of Acheloios, especially since Miletos had its own sister temple to Aphrodite.

Having established, beyond reasonable doubt, that the cult of Acheloios was operative in Miletos during Thales' life, I move in Chapter 7 to a more philosophical argument that Thales must have transitioned from a more mythological and religious mindset to a philosophical mindset, else he could not be credited with establishing anything new. Here I focus mostly on critiquing the work of Patricia O'Grady, who wrote a monograph on Thales, and who insists that Thales was not influenced by myth *at all*. First, I point out some obvious (and serious) shortcomings in her work. These consist of the following: (1) a conflation of myth and religion; (2) a complete lack of research into the culture of seventh to sixth century Miletos; and (3) an unjustified overextension of some fragments of Xenophanes and Heraclitus. These three terminal errors result in an anachronistic characterization that paints Thales as a modern scientist of sorts, and, unfortunately, some philosophers, but not all, have adopted O'Grady's assessment. I then provide a philosophical argument, largely following Francis Cornford, that insists philosophy could not emerge *ex nihilo* in the manner O'Grady describes, but must have developed analogously from myth and religion (hence Bruno Snell claims *mythos* and *logos* are never fully separated, and I agree). Theories like those of Cornford and Snell have diminished in influence since the mid-20th century because they assumed too much about the internal machinations of the thinker. But now we have proof of Acheloios in Miletos, providing the nourishment for fresh, fruitful speculations about mythological and cultic influence on philosophy. (There is no concrete evidence of Okeanos, or any similar Near Eastern or Egyptian figures, directly attested in Miletos). I end the section by reviewing the major developmental theme of the origin of philosophy promoted by Herman Diels and instituted by Walter Kranz, and followed later by Kirk, Raven, and Schofield (among many others). With this developmental scheme in mind, I suggest that the problem question confronting Thales was not, "What is that from which all

things originate, all things consist, and all things return?” (O’Grady’s Aristotle), nor Panchenko’s reduced version borrowed from Anaximander, which amounts to something like, “What is that from which all things originate and to which all things return?” in which Thales was looking for a more *convincing* account of divinity. I say this because such questions were already answered by myth and religion—perhaps not perfectly articulated, but enough so that the theory could be formulated that ὕδωρ was the ἀρχή, without a clear, delineated abstract question concerning ἀρχή in search of a candidate. (Hence, ὕδωρ as the ἀρχή need not have been inferred via observation of the properties of water—a point made by Popper in his assessment of the Presocratics).

With this philosophical point settled, I then turn to an examination of other possible mythological and religious influences on Thales that might have helped give rise to philosophy proper. First and most obvious is Okeanos, whom many others, apparently since Hippias, have suggested might have had an influence on Thales. First, however, I discredit that he [Okeanos] was the primary influence based on the following: The two lines in Homer from Book 14 concerning Okeanos might be later interpolations, since the evidence presented by D’Alessio concerning Book 21 is so convincing, and Book 14 is well known for its internal inconsistencies. I support the “orthodox” view of Acheloios, again following D’Alessio, with the authority of Megakleides, the pre-Alexandrian scholar, and Zenodotus, a former librarian at the Library of Alexander, both of whom were ethnic Ionians that advocated Acheloios was the original source of all water. Overall, I insist that there is no strong evidence that Okeanos was worshipped or even known about in seventh to sixth century B.C.E. Miletos, so it is impossible to say he definitely influenced the thinker. However, there is some evidence of a conflation between

Okeanos and Acheloios that appears after Thales, and since we know Okeanos was attested in Attica c. 590 B.C.E., I do not dismiss the possibility of influence entirely.

Following these observations, I look east, largely following W.K.C. Guthrie and M.L. West and examine Apsu and Asaluhi in the Near East and Nūn in Egypt. These figures show remarkable similarity to the idea that water is the “origin,” or ἀρχή as traditionally construed in Homeric epic, insofar as they operate as primordial water from which all things emerge. I then examine Yahweh, who also has a distinct aquatic dimension and who, like Acheloios, was probably represented in art as a man-faced bull up to the sixth century B.C.E. Finally, I’ll look at two Milesian figures: Aphrodite *Oikus*, worshipped there and at other Milesian colonies as a sea goddess, and Poseidon, who had an early cult in Miletos. Combined, these two figures provide an interesting example of a multiplicity of deities in the same area all sharing an underlying aquatic dimension, indicative of Thales’ historically consistent use of the term θεῶν in reference to water, which was likely influenced by earlier Dodonaean practices. Altogether, these similar aquatic deities indicate that Thales was confronted with various (sometimes competing) myths as he developed as a thinker and particularly as he traveled (a point recognized by von Fritz and Popper), and thus the problem question he faced was a question concerning the underlying unity or truth behind these myths—a vindication of myth by a pious sage, in other words, not an abandonment or rejection of sacred traditions. Thus, Thales seems to have transitioned from the particular watery myths to the general ὕδωρ, and I’ll show in the next chapter that this happened through Acheloios.

I therefore offer an essential component to the overall argument in Chapter 9, that Acheloios was the primary and most influential deity on Thales, for a variety of reasons. Here, I will present a more robust picture of Acheloios and expand on some of the details that were

briefly summarized in Chapter 4. In Part I of this chapter, I will demonstrate that the “modified” (or qualified threefold) Aristotelian ἀρχή was presaged (or tacitly expressed) by Acheloios. First, I will exhibit the evidence of Acheloios as a shapeshifter, able to become anything, and also a deity pivotal in sustaining life, instrumental in birth, and essential to the emergence of personal and civic identity. These features all indicate Acheloios was an “originating” deity in antiquity. Next, I will examine the importance of the cultic belief in assimilation with Acheloios and how this is indicative of the later ἀρχή as “governing” principle, not constitutive principle. Furthermore, in this section we will look at the positioning of Acheloios as the ultimate source of water and a chthonic deity, and how these characteristics tacitly expresses the later notion of water as underlying principle. Finally, we will look at Acheloios as a psychopomp and his role in death rituals, and here demonstrate that he was rather widely and very openly associated with death, hence “that to which all things return” was tacitly incorporated into his overall mythos. The second part of this chapter looks at the notion of the One among the Many in relation to the idea that the rivers of the world are the sinews of Acheloios, and that he is their underlying strength. Here the double meaning of ἰς as both strength and sinew is reflected in the notion of ἀρχή as One among the Many. This section will also entertain arguments concerning the abstraction inherent in the iconic identification of Acheloios as a man-faced bull, in which case I’ll point out that recognition of the man-faced bull as a local embodiment of Acheloios requires a process of abstraction conducive to philosophical activity. Combined, all these aspects of the Acheloios tradition provided, in my opinion, the groundwork for Thales to develop a more delineated notion of a nominally demythologized principle of all things analogously from the Acheloios tradition.

At this point in the dissertation, we still need to know a bit more about the character and structure of Thales' conceptual scheme in order to successfully refute the Neo-Marxians and therefore prove the central thesis. To that end, the next section documents a chain of connection from Thales to Plato, because it is in Plato that we find an all-encompassing presentation of Thales' philosophy in relation to the cult of Acheloios (and nature and man quite generally).

Chapter 10 therefore consists of an examination of Pythagoras, Hippo, and Empedokles, who I will argue were part of a single, esoteric tradition that was largely filtered through Thales. In Part I, I provide the evidence for the claim that Pythagoras was a highly regarded pupil of Thales and seemingly instrumental in spreading elements of the cult of Acheloios throughout Magna Graecia and Sicily. After establishing that Pythagoras was Thales' favorite pupil, I then consider how his obsession with purification rituals and tales of him speaking with rivers indicates an association with the Acheloios tradition. Next, I examine some archaeological and epigraphic evidence. In one case, an inscription refers to "Acheloios Pythagoras," and in another, we find Acheloios iconography hidden in the bowels of a secret, subterranean Neopythagorean basilica near Rome. Most significantly, there is an amber pendant of Acheloios dating to Pythagoras' life and found in the general area in which he died, which is remarkably reminiscent of Thales' employment of amber as a didactic device concerning the soul. In Part II, I exhibit evidence that Hippo went so far as to advocate an aquatic soul, and this has been compared, however loosely, to Thales' theory ever since Aristotle's commentary. More, Hippo (an Italian) is described as both Ionian and Pythagorean, indicative of an association between both traditions which seemingly reflects an origin in Thales. In Part III, I will review evidence from my earlier work that ties Acheloios to Empedokles which, when combined with the well-attested association of Empedokles and Pythagoras, is indicative of a tradition that was originally