HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Frederic Will, Ph.D.

Anaximines (d. 528 B.C.)

.Aristotle makes the following comment, in the *Metaphysics* (#62).

Most of the earliest philosophers conceived only of material principles as underlying all things. That of which all things consist, from which they first come and into which on their destruction they are ultimately resolved, of which the essence persists although modified by its affections-this, they say, is an element and principle of existing things. Hence they believe that nothing is either generated or destroyed, since this kind of primary entity always persists.... In the same way nothing else is generated or destroyed; for there is some one entity (or more than one) which always persists and from which all other things are generated. All are not agreed, however, as to the number and character of these principles. Thales, the founder of this school of philosophy, says the permanent entity is water.... Anaximenes and Diogenes held that air is prior to water, and is of all corporeal elements most truly the first principle.

What we know of Anaximines is little. We have to assume he lived in Asia Minor, with the other 'Milesian' material monists, Thales and Anaximander, for whom the search for a world principle led through the early impulses of scientific thought. The kind of science that drove Anaximines, to judge from the numerous comments on and rare fragments of him, was a blend of observation and poetic enrichment. Like his contemporaries he was interested both in locating a physical principle—in his case air—which in its many transformations could become the multiple forms of our universe, and in characterizing the kind of balance that 'Inheres' among the component parts of the created world. The first inquiry, into physical principles, led Anaximines to identify an element which, on the Asia Minor coast, could regularly be seen evaporating (and cooling) into the sky, and condensing (and heating) into objects on earth. From these two processes the constitutions of all that is—from the stars and planets to rocks under our feet—could be seen as part of a natural whole. Poetry of a sort is what supplies the vision and balance of that whole: the hot and the cold, the dry and the wet in polarity, all things balanced in an ultimate stasis, which gives the lie to the appearance of change.