

Development of Thought

The word "philosophy" comes from the Ancient Greek *philosophia*, which literally means "love of wisdom". The pre-Socratics were 6th and 5th century BCE Greek thinkers who introduced a new way of inquiring into the world and the place of human beings in it. They were recognized in antiquity as the first philosophers and scientists of the Western tradition. The early Greek philosophers thought of themselves as inquirers into many things, and the range of their inquiry was vast. They had views about the nature of the world, and these views encompass what we today call physics, chemistry, geology, meteorology, astronomy, embryology, and psychology (and other areas of natural inquiry), as well as theology, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

The world of the pre-Socratics was one that was god-saturated, where the gods may intervene in all aspects of the world, from the weather to mundane particulars of human life, reaching into the ordinary world order from outside, in a way that humans must accept but cannot ultimately understand. The pre-Socratic reject this account, instead seeing the world as a *kosmos*, an ordered natural arrangement that is inherently intelligible and not subject to supra-natural intervention.

Some pre-Socratic philosophers include Heraclitus, who is famous for his insistence on ever-present change in the universe, as stated in the famous saying, "No man ever steps in the same river twice". Another pre-Socratic was Pythagoras, who is given credit for discovering the Pythagorean theorem, a theorem in geometry

that states that in a right-angled triangle the area of the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares of the other two sides—that is,

$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. Zeno of Elea is a pre-Socratic best known for his paradoxes, which Bertrand Russell has described as "immeasurably subtle and profound" Some of these paradoxes could not be properly solved until the invention of modern calculus thousands of years later.

The philosopher Socrates was born in Athens in 469 BC, and he would go on to become one of the most important figures in Western philosophy and thought. He did this despite having written nothing down. All that we know about him comes from second hand accounts, much from his student Plato, another famous classical Greek philosopher. Socrates is said to have been the initiator of more focused study upon the human things including the analysis of patterns of reasoning and argument, and the nature of the good life and the importance of understanding and knowledge in order to pursue it; the explication of the concept of justice, and its relation to various political systems.

Socrates's pupil Plato was one of the most prolific writers in antiquity and an influential figure in philosophy, central in Western philosophy. He was Socrates' student, and founded the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. Along with Socrates and his most-famous student, Aristotle, Plato helped to lay the foundations of Western philosophy and science. Plato is well known for his *Socratic Dialogues*, which feature Socrates as the main character, talking about many philosophical issues. Plato's dialogues have been used to teach a

range of subjects, including philosophy, logic, ethics, rhetoric, religion and mathematics. The Dialogues are the primary way we know about Socrates teachings.

In one of Plato's dialogues, named the Protagoras, Socrates seeks to uncover the unity of virtue and to discover if it is teachable. He argues with Protagoras, a sophist (people who charged money to teach rhetoric and philosophy to young statesmen and nobility), who claimed he could teach virtue for a fee. Socrates claims that all one needs to live a virtuous life is to accumulate knowledge of the world. He claims there is no "weakness of will" — that no one knowingly does, or seeks to do, evil (moral wrong); that anyone who does moral wrong does so involuntarily, they do not truly know what they are doing; this is the meaning of the term "no man errs willingly". Socrates also shows that there are not many virtues, but that all virtues are one, namely, knowledge.

Born in 384 B.C.E. in the Macedonian region of northeastern Greece, Aristotle was sent to Athens at about the age of seventeen to study in Plato's Academy, then the pre-eminent place of learning in the Greek world. He would become one of the greatest philosophers of all time, rivaling his tutor Plato. His works would span a wide range of disciplines, from logic, metaphysics and philosophy of mind, through ethics, political theory, aesthetics and rhetoric, and into such primarily non-philosophical fields as empirical biology, where he excelled at detailed plant and animal observation and taxonomy. Aristotle was a scientist in the true sense. After the death of Plato, at the behest of the Macedonian King Philip, Aristotle would tutor a young boy named Alexander, who would go on to become "The Great".

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle pursues the subject of how men should best live their lives. He asks the question "what is the final good for humans?", or what is worth pursuing *for its own sake*, things like money or fame are not the final good. Aristotle finds that happiness, or *eudaimonia*, is the final good; it is worth pursuing for its own sake. Aristotle thinks we achieve happiness by fully realizing our natures, by actualizing to the highest degree our human capacities. By this he means pursuing knowledge, and learning new things; it is the ability to reason that separates us from the other animals, that makes us human. Aristotle also believed in what he called "right habits"; he believed the best way to live a good life was to make all the good things you do habitual. For instance studying, eating healthy, or exercising. It does no good to merely sit around and *think* about the changes you need to make in your life.

In medieval times the world of philosophy was dominated by scholasticism. Not so much a philosophy or a theology as a method of learning, scholasticism places a strong emphasis on dialectical reasoning to extend knowledge by inference, and to resolve contradictions. Scholastic thought is also known for rigorous conceptual analysis and the careful drawing of distinctions. The scholastics were interested in making philosophy conform to religious dogma. Some of the most famous scholastics were Saint Augustine of Hippo. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Anselm of Canterbury, and William of Ockham.

Anselm is known as the originator of the ontological argument for the existence of God. Anselm defined God as "...that than which nothing greater can be conceived," and then argued that this being could exist in the mind. He suggested

that, if the greatest possible being exists in the mind, it must also exist in reality. If it only exists in the mind, a greater being is possible—one which exists in the mind and in reality. William of Ockham is known for Ockham's razor, which states that among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected. Other, more complicated solutions may ultimately prove correct, but—in the absence of certainty—the fewer assumptions that are made, the better.

René Descartes is often credited with being the “Father of Modern Philosophy.” This title is justified due both to his break with the traditional Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy prevalent at his time and to his development and promotion of the new, mechanistic sciences. In Descartes' time there were many advances in the sciences which made people question the certainty of the religious scholastic philosophers. Descartes was also a mathematician, and is known for developing the techniques that made possible algebraic (or “analytic”) geometry.

Descartes is perhaps best known for his famous reasoning: *Cogito, ergo sum* or “I think, therefore I am.” In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes imagines there is an evil demon who is trying to trick him, so that everything available to the senses must be doubted. He rejects any ideas that can be doubted, and then reestablishes them in order to acquire a firm foundation for genuine knowledge. Initially, Descartes arrives at only a single principle: thought exists. Thought cannot be separated from me, therefore, I exist.

One of the deepest and most lasting legacies of Descartes' philosophy is his thesis that mind and body are really distinct—a thesis now called “mind-body

dualism." He reaches this conclusion by arguing that the nature of the mind (that is, a thinking, non-extended thing) is completely different from that of the body (that is, an extended, non-thinking thing), and therefore it is possible for one to exist without the other. This argument gives rise to the famous problem of mind-body causal interaction still debated today: how can the mind cause some of our bodily limbs to move (for example, raising one's hand to ask a question), and how can the body's sense organs cause sensations in the mind when their natures are completely different?