

# Philosophical Foundations in Ancient Greece

Who are you?

Where does the world come from?

Is there will or meaning to life?

Is there life after death?

How should we live?

*“The only thing we require to be good philosophers is the faculty of wonder.”*

## Greek Philosophy

- **Goal:** To find natural rather than supernatural causes for events = “**natural philosophers**”
  - ✓ assumed “something” had always existed
  - ✓ basic “something” that causes change, that everything comes from and returns to
  - ✓ looked for laws of nature by observation = scientific reasoning = “**science**”
    1. **Thales of Miletus (585 BC)** accurately predicted a solar eclipse/ believed the source of life was water
    2. **Anaximander of Miletus (610-546 BC)** “worlds evolve from and dissolve into the ‘boundless’”
    3. **Anaximenes (570-526 BC)** source of life was vapor
- **Rationalists = Eleatics** (from Greek colony of Elea in S. Italy) **How can substance suddenly change into something else?**
  4. **Parmenides (540-480 BC)** Everything that exists has always existed, therefore everything is everlasting = nothing comes from nothing
    - ❖ didn’t trust senses, had faith in reason = “**rationalism**”
  5. **Zeno of Elea (c. 450 BC)** devised clever paradoxes to show that motion of any kind is impossible, and that reality must be unitary and unchanging
- **Empiricists** = can “trust senses”
  6. **Heracitus (540-480 BC)** = “flow” or change in nature which is natural = “we cannot step twice into the same river”, sensory perceptions are reliable
    - ❖ “The tension and conflict which govern everything in our experience are moderated only by the operation of a universal principle of proportionality in all things”
    - ❖ **Logos = reason** = “universal reason” or law
- **Between Rationalism & Empiricism**
  7. **Empedocles (490-433 BC)** agreed with both = proposed 4 elements (earth, air, fire and water) make up all but remain unchanged therefore “nothing changes”
    - ❖ **Causes of change:** “love” binds, “strife” separates
    - ❖ Elements vs. natural forces
    - ❖ even vision is the seeking of “like” elements
- **Materialists**
  8. **Anaxagoras (500-428 BC)** first philosopher in the Western tradition and in Athens to draw a substantial distinction between inert and chaotic matter on the one hand and mind as an active principle and source of order on the other hand.
    - ❖ believed in infinite number of particles invisible to the eye, each one with the characteristics of whole = “seeds”
    - ❖ “sun a hot rock, not a god” = charged with being an atheist

- ❖ universe held together by “order”
- ❖ all heavenly bodies same material, moon has no life of its own
- 9. **Democritus (460-370 BC)** If things don’t change, must be tiny building blocks called “atoms” (“uncuttable”) = 1. smallest parts 2. “eternal, immutable, indivisible”
  - ❖ have hooks or barbs and can be used over
  - ❖ no soul or force could intervene, only material
  - ❖ “soul” made up of “soul atoms” (which flew away, therefore no immortal soul)
- **Fatalists** = belief that future is predestined
  - ❖ Oracle at Delphi = learn one’s fate from Apollo vs. “know thyself” [**same struggle of religion vs. secular**]
  - ❖ believed affected world history, sickness due to the gods
- **Historians** = looking for natural causes of events
  - 10. **Herodotus (484-424 BC)**
  - 11. **Thucydides (460-400 BC)**
- **Physicians** = natural cause for illness
  - 12. **Hippocrates (b. 460 BC)**

## Athenian Philosophers

- **Sophists:** “Wise”/Pre-Socratic philosophers who offered to teach young Athenians how to use logic and rhetoric to defeat opponents in any controversy. *Socrates* and *Plato* sharply criticized most of the sophists because they accepted monetary rewards for encouraging unprincipled persuasive methods.
  - ❖ rejected mythology, also taught philosophical speculation = “skepticism” (man cannot know nature’s riddles)
  - ❖ **Protagoras (485-410 BC)** “man is the measure of all things” = relativistic view that man could not know the nature of God (for ex.) therefore an “agnostic” = values natural vs. socially induced therefore no norms for right or wrong
- **Socrates (470-399 BC)** = Changed Western philosophy with investigation into development of moral character
  - ❖ Never wrote a line, though Plato wrote about him in “Dialogues”
  - ❖ Used Socratic inquiry, felt he had “divine voice”, “destroying the illusion that we already comprehend the world perfectly and honestly accepting the fact of our own ignorance, Socrates believed, are vital steps toward our acquisition of genuine knowledge, by discovering universal definitions of the key concepts governing human life”
  - ❖ Most remarkably, Socrates argues here that **knowledge and virtue are so closely related that no human agent ever knowingly does evil**: we all invariably do what we believe to be best. Improper conduct, then, can only be a product of our ignorance rather than a symptom of weakness of the will
  - ❖ 399 BC accused of “introducing new gods and corrupting youth” = 500 jurors sentenced to death, wouldn’t appeal for leniency
  - ❖ **Similarities with Christ?**
    1. Disliked “sophists”, didn’t teach for money, was a “philo-sopher” (one who loves wisdom)
    2. Troubled because he knows so little: **“The only thing I know, is that I know nothing.”**

- 3. “Emperor’s new clothes” = troubling
- 4. Unshakable faith in human reason = **Rationalist**  
**Sophists** = relativists      **Socrates** = *virtue* = rational norms

- **Plato (428-347 BC)** “truth vs. ideal”

- ❖ Published ***Apology*** (Socrates’ defense) + ***Epistles, Dialogues*** = preserved because he set up schools called after *Academos*
- ❖ Question: “What is immutable and what ‘flows’”? Believed everything itself “flowed” but the “mold” was immutable
  - ✓ “Molds” or “forms” were IDEAS therefore the world of ideas was behind the material world
  - ✓ Because material world in constant change, we can not know, but we can know the unchangeable IDEAS through reason, not senses = reality is the same for everyone
  - ✓ Man = body that flows, immortal soul
  - ✓ *Parable of the Cave*
- ❖ Question: “***Why are all horses the same?***”
- ❖ Question: “***What came first: the chicken or the “idea” of a chicken?***”
- ❖ State: “virtuous state” where everyone knows place
  - ✓ Viewed by subsequent authors as “totalitarian”
  - ✓ Women could “reason” and should be educated
  - ✓ Children should be raised by the state

BODY	SOUL	VIRTUE	STATE
head	reason	wisdom	rulers
chest	will	courage	auxiliaries
abdomen	appetite	temperance	laborers

- **Aristotle (384-322 BC)** Macedonian, interested in natural studies [Plato interested in “forms”, Aristotle interested in changes or ***natural processes***]

- ❖ Used senses as well as reason to write 170 lectures on classified sciences
- ❖ Believed idea formed after viewing many objects --- ideas or forms = characteristics of a species
- ❖ NATURE not ideas real world
- ❖ Causality = believed there was a “final cause” or a purpose to all actions = **GOD?**
- ❖ Founded LOGIC = CLASSIFICATION
  - ✓ Classification made man unique because he could reason = believed a “first mover” or “God” had placed things in motion = **DEISM?**
- ❖ Happiness: 1. Pleasure
  - 2. Life as free, responsible citizen
  - 3. Thinker/philosopher
  - ✓ Must all be present at the same time = rejected imbalance, believed in “Golden Mean”
- ❖ “Man, by nature, is a political animal” = “State is highest form of human fellowship”:
  - ✓ **Monarchy:** shouldn’t degenerate into tyranny
  - ✓ **Aristocracy:** shouldn’t degenerate into oligarchy

- ✓ **Democracy:** could turn into “mob rule”
- ❖ **Views on Women:** man provided “form”, woman only “substance”
  - ✓ little experience with women, led insular life at top of his field
  - ✓ *view of women passed on to the Middle Ages*

## Hellenism

- Introduced by Alexander (356-323 BC) = combined Macedonian, Greek, Persian & Egyptian cultures
- **Late Antiquity** = Romans (50 BC) inherited Hellenic culture
  - ❖ Fusion of “national” religions = **syncretism** which led to religious doubt, cultural dissolution and pessimism = “the world has grown old”
  - ❖ frequent references to salvation from death
    - new philosophies to overcome pessimism [Athens = philosophy, Alexandria = science]
    - began to address questions of how men should live or **ethics**
      1. **Cynics (400 BC)** founded by **Diogenes**: rejected material objects as source of happiness; could not trust the “fleeting”  
 “**Cynicism**” = “disbelief in human sincerity and insensitivity to the suffering of others”
      2. **Stoics (300 BC)** founded by **Zeno** = each person shared common “logos” (a world in microcosm); must be a universal or “natural law” (supported Socrates vs. the Sophists); believed in **monism** (only one nature = spirit + material) in contrast to Plato = man must accept natural law and his destiny  
 “**Stoic**” = “one who endures pain”  
 \***Marcus Aurelius** (121-180 AD)  
 \***Cicero** (106-43 BC) formed “humanism” = individual is the focus  
 \***Seneca** (4 BC-65 AD) “to mankind, mankind is holy” = slogan for humanism
      3. **Epicureans (300 BC)** founded by **Epicurus** = pleasure is the highest good, must calculate pleasure and weigh choices; should not fear death (like Democritus) or the gods - lived in seclusion but later became self-indulgent  
 “**Epicurean**” = “someone who lives only for pleasure”
      4. **Neoplatonism (205-270 AD)** founded by Plotinus = like Plato believed man’s body was of sensory world but also had immortal soul; Plotinus believed God was “light” and it is our soul which is closest, however God is reflected in aspects of natural world = experienced fusion with god = “**mystical experience**”
      5. **Mysticism** = merging with God or “cosmic” spirit (“One with God”) = becoming part of something greater = often seek meditation and simple life to reach this state:
- \***Western:** (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) meeting with a personal God who is above and beyond world
- \***Eastern:** (Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese religions) fusion with cosmic spirit is one

# CHRISTIANITY

**Indo-Europeans vs. Semites** = both influence European culture

- **Indo-Europeans (4000 years ago)** migrations from the Caspian Sea region (includes all language groups but Finno-Ugrian, Basque)
  - ✓ **polytheistic**
  - ✓ **dualistic** (“good vs. evil”) desire to predict
  - ✓ sought “insight” or “knowledge” (word *idea*) or video in Latin =
  - ✓ **cyclical view of history**
  - ✓ **pantheism** (deity in everything in nature) monism requires meditation so, in East, passivity and seclusion = ideals
  - ✓ **“Ascetic” life** of seclusion influenced Medieval monastic life
  - ✓ transmigration of the soul
- **Semites (4000 years ago)** originated on Arabic peninsula = affected all three major religions
  - ✓ **Christianity** influenced by both Semitic (Judaism) and Indo-European (Hellenic)
  - ✓ **monotheism**
  - ✓ **linear view of history** (beginning and end with judgment) + God intervenes
  - ✓ **hearing** most important sense (“Hear O Israel”) because God spoke
  - ✓ no religious pictures in Judaism, Islam; Christianity influenced by Indo-Eur. so pictures
  - ✓ distance between God and His creation = emphasis on **redemption** = man cannot do it alone
  - ✓ Christianity a radical combining of the two
- **Goethe:** “He who cannot draw on 3000 years, is living from hand to mouth.”