

CLAS 101: The Greek Philosophers

- Φυσιόλογοι (physiologoi), “natural philosophers”
 - Φύσικοι (pysikoi), “physicists”
 - Θεολόγοι (theologoi), “theologians”
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The Pre-Socratics

These philosophers existed primarily before Socrates, although some were alive during his lifetime.

Pythagoras (c. 570 - c. 495 BC)

- Ratios
- Transmigration or reincarnation of souls
- Vegetarianism

Heraclitus (c. 535 - c. 475 BC)

- Search for knowledge and truth
- Everything is in a constant state of change (Πάντα ῥεῖ, panta rhei)

Parmenides (c. 515 - c. 460 BC)

- Existence is eternal, motionless and changeless
- Sense perception is neither real nor valid

Empedocles (c. 490 - c. 430 BC)

- Everything is composed of different combinations of the 4 elements
 - Air, water, fire, earth

Democritus (c. 460 - c. 370 BC)

- World is made up of invisible, indivisible particles known as **atoms**
 - Sense perception is important
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Socrates and His Successors

Socrates and his two successors, Plato and Aristotle, have most profoundly affected what we call “western philosophy”. Based in Athens, these teachers founded famous schools such as the Academy of Plato and Aristotle’s Lyceum.

Socrates (c. 470 - 399 BC)

- Wisdom is the awareness of ignorance
- Single divine being
- **Dialectic** method: coming to conclusions through questions and reasoning
- Left no writing, only known through Plato

Plato (c. 428 - c. 348 BC)

- **Theory of forms**

- **Allegory of the Cave**

- Plato’s Republic: “Philosopher-king”

Aristotle (c. 384 - c. 322 BC)

- Faith in the power of the human mind
- Enormous breadth of learning:
 - Earliest formal study of Logic
 - Physics, Metaphysics, Zoology, Biology, Psychology, Ethics

- Profound influence on Judaic, Christian and Islamic scholarship
 - Childhood tutor of Alexander the Great
 - Only 1/3 of his literary output survives
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Epicureanism

This philosophy, named after its founder Epicurus, comes down to us mainly through the writings of Lucretius, a much later Roman poet.

- Lucretius' **De Rerum Natura** (On the Nature of Things)
 - No afterlife
 - Universe is infinite
 - Everything is made up of atoms
 - Gods do not interact in human affairs
 - Withdrawal from politics/public life
 - Pursuit of pleasure
 - Goals: happiness and freedom from fear
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Stoicism

This originally Greek philosophy, named after the Stoa Poikile in Athens, became very popular among the Romans.

- Mastery over emotions
 - Everything happens in accordance with Fate
 - Passion controlled by reason
 - Participation in public life
 - Famous Stoics: Zeno, Seneca
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Cynicism

This philosophy was founded by Antisthenes, once a student of Socrates. It is named after the Greek word for "dog", since the Cynics lived lives of beggary and poverty.

- Goal: happiness through freedom from desire for wealth, fame, power or pleasure
- Supreme importance of individual freedom
- Rejection of social conventions
- Famous Cynics: Diogenes of Sinope ("The Dog")