The Origins of Philosophy: Why the Greeks?

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Philosophy defined: Greek etymology - Philo (love) of Sophia (wisdom)

I. Why the Greeks?

A. Geography, Culture, History (Mediterranean trade, goods and ideas- Egypt, Persia, East/West)
   - Ionia- Miletus, Ephesus- Greek Seaport in Asia Minor (Pre-Socratics)
   - Athens- Athena: democracy, free-market (Socrates in Agora, Plato- Academy, Aristotle- Lyceum)

II. The Pre-Socratics: Philosophy as Proto-Science (from myth to reason) Naturalistic explanations

A. Thales- (625-547 BC) Water- essence of all things (life, solid-liquid-gas)
B. Anaximander- the boundless- the infinite as beginning of all things (causality) vortex in motion
C. Xenophanes (of Colophon) gods as fictional- anthropomorphic creations- moral flaws (balance)
   - Rainbows- which had been seen as mythical and religious- as natural phenomena- cloud vapors
D. Pythagoras (Croton-southern Italy)- mathematical ratios of music-key to immortality of souls,
   - abstract forms – key influence on Plato’s forms as ideal models of things: triangles-beauty, justice
E. Heraclitus- ( Ephesus) Reality in flux like river- all things come into being through opposition; Logos- rational pattern of world-order- eternal- “words-rational arguments-logic-wisdom"
F. Parmenides- (Elea-Greek colony of Italy) follow Reason (one) to understand senses (many)
   - experience of senses (contradictory) contrary to reason- (logos-unifying principle) met Socrates
G. Democritus- Atomism: atoms- infinite, indivisible small particles moving in void- vortex of motion;
   - the soul is composed of infinitely fine and spherical atoms that interpenetrate the body

III. Socrates: Philosophy as Moral Virtue

A. Background: Athens (century of democracy- the assembly) free speech and trial
   - The Sophists: First professional teachers of higher education to tutor the “best men” for leadership in democratic city. Teaching rhetoric- principles and practice of persuasive speech, relativism- make a case on either side of any position- success measured in arguing both positions equally (relativity of truth)
   - Protagoras- “Of all things the measure is man.” Measure= standard or criterion to appeal to what to believe- nothing outside of ourselves (Sophists taught students to argue both sides of any position equally, implying no independent standard of value- persuasion (end to win)
   - Socrates disagreed with Sophists- Search for moral virtue- justice- absolute, not relative
B. The Oracle of Delphi- Socrates the wisest of all men- Socrates- “I know nothing” knowledge vs. belief- Socratic method- questioning what is taken for knowledge- testing definitions-
contradictions- method of questioning as philosophic examination- the unexamined life as un- worth living” Socrates referred to himself as “midwife of knowledge” and “gadfly” of Athens.

IV. Plato: Philosophy as the search for the ideal

A. The Dialogues: Early (accurate report of Socrates), Latter (Republic and theory of forms)
B. The Republic: The ideal state (education of guardians, the philosopher king)
C. The Forms: Reality descending from intelligible to material (Pure Forms, ideas or blue prints, things, copies) Allegory of the cave- prisoners see only shadows- philosopher escapes to see Sun as the source of light and all appearances- returns to free fellow slaves who resist enlightenment
D. The Soul as the essence of a person- distinct from the body (prison house) mind-intelligible world
E. The Arts- Plato censors the poets in the Republic for creating illusion and myth (art-copies)

V. Aristotle: Philosophy as the examination of the real (material and real world- can be known)

Student-teacher relationship- Socrates- Plato- Aristotle (Alexander) (Macedonia to Athens)

A. Matter and Form (form within matter as essence- no separate world of forms, just actual world of substance or matter) observation-categories- types
   Beings into subjects and substances- species and genres
B. Logic as tool-syllogism- criteria for arguments – validity and soundness- deduction and induction
   From premises to conclusions (true premises to true conclusions) structure of arguments
C. Causality- Teleology- purpose implied in causality- four causes- material, formal, efficient, final
   Final Cause- unmoved mover- ultimate cause of all things- necessary unifying principle
D. Entelechy- the potential (acorn) — actuality (oak tree) purpose or end implied (human- rational animal)
E. Naturalistic account of the soul- essence of person but not other-worldly, part of body- rational faculty of human (capacity to think) cognition- higher function but always connected to living body. Souls are the forms of certain kinds of bodies
F. The Good Life-- Eudaemonia- well-being- human flourishing- life well-lived (Virtue-Excellence)
G. Ethics- The golden mean- moderation- balance between excess and deficit- happiness as a bi-product of virtue or excellence (not an end in itself) Virtue can be taught- training habit and will
H. The Arts- Aristotle in Poetics analyzes tragedy (epic) and tragic fall leading to catharsis (Oedipus)

VI. Conclusion: Greek contributions to Philosophy

A. Religion- Plato (idealism), soul over body, mind over matter
B. Science- Pre-Socratics and Aristotle- observations of natural world
C. Logic- Tool for testing arguments (Aristotle) Deduction- validity, Induction- soundness
D. Ethics- Sophists- Relativism, Plato-absolute principles, Aristotle- practical and applied ethics, Virtue