

## The Origins of Philosophy: Why the Greeks?

Dr. Kevin R. Morgan

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