

# Greek Philosophy

and Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*

## Philosophy

- Etymology:
  - Middle English *philosophie*, from Old French, from Latin *philosophia*, from Greek *philosophi*, from **philosophos**
- *philo* = love
- *sophos* = wisdom
- *Philosophos* = Lover of wisdom

## 'Inventing' Philosophy

- The Greeks invented philosophy as a formal, intellectual discipline.
  - But they were not the first marvel at the world and to ask and answer questions about it.
- Religion also asks the big questions and provides answers for them.
- What is different about the two systems?
  - How would they answer questions about the nature of the world, the nature of ourselves, the nature of God?

## Major Areas of Philosophy

- Metaphysics: Concerned with the nature of ultimate reality.
- Epistemology: Regarding the nature of knowledge.
- Axiology: The study of values, including aesthetics, ethics, and political philosophy.
- Logic: Having to do with the laws of thought and forms of arguments.

Metaphysics: Concerned with the nature of ultimate reality.

- What is reality?
- Is there a God?
- What is mind?
- How is the mind related to the body?
- Is there life after death?
- Are we truly free?

Epistemology: Regarding the nature of knowledge.

- What is knowledge?
- What can I know?
- How skeptical should I be?
- How reliable are our senses?
- What is truth?

Axiology: The study of values, including aesthetics, ethics, and political philosophy.

- What is beauty? Is art intrinsically good or bad, or is beauty in the eye of the beholder?
- What makes an action right or wrong?
- Does morality depend on religion?
- Are moral principles objectively valid?
- Political theory, government, civil disobedience, natural rights, etc.

Logic: Having to do with the laws of thought and forms of arguments.

- What is a valid and sound argument?
- How does logic contribute to our knowledge?
- Logical fallacies.

## Greek Philosophy

- Archaic Period, Natural Philosophy
  - Thales, Pythagoras
- Hellenic Age
  - Sophists
  - Socrates
  - Plato
  - Aristotle
- Hellenistic Age
  - Skepticism and Stoicism

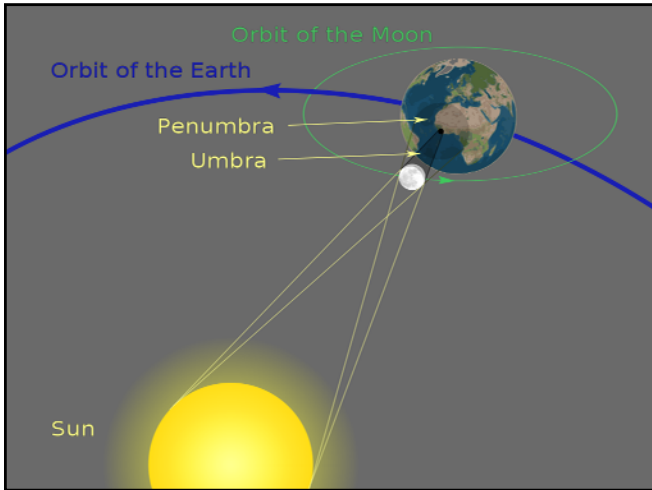
## Natural Philosophy

- The first philosophers conceived of a world where natural causes and effects operate (rather than supernatural ones).
- Natural philosophy encompassed both “science” and “philosophy.”
  - This connection persisted for 22 centuries, until the Newtonian revolution, when science stopped speculating about the purpose of nature.

## Thales

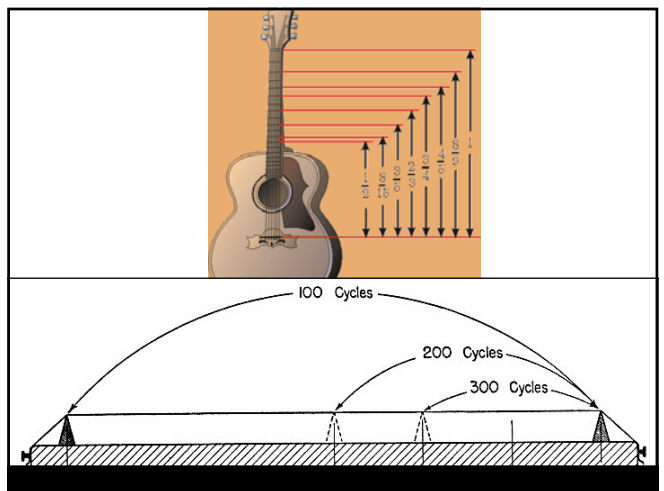
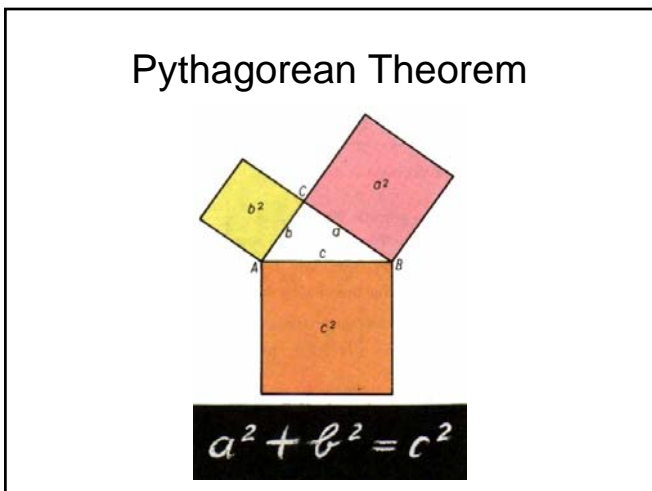
- Founder of the Milesian school of thought.
- First to predict an eclipse (solar).
- First to propose that natural laws (and human reason) could explain the universe, a belief that was found deplorable by more religious people.
- Reasoned that everything was made of matter (and that the fundamental substance was water), so we say that he was a *materialist*.

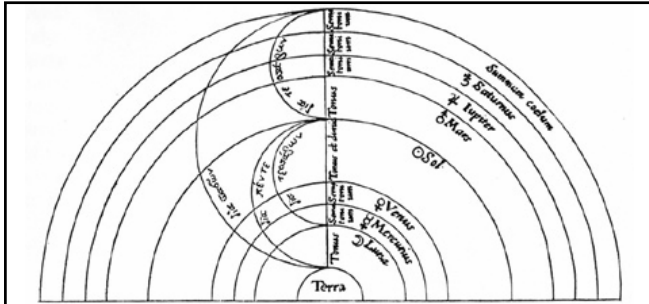




### Pythagoras

- Most famous pre-Socratic philosopher.
- Led a group (or brotherhood, or cult) of followers, known as *Pythagoreans*.
- He was an *idealist*. Rejecting the materialist outlook, he believed "Everything is made of numbers."





From Stanley's *The History of Philosophy*.

**THE INTERVALS AND HARMONIES OF THE SPHERES.**

In the Pythagorean concept of the music of the spheres, the interval between the earth and the sphere of the fixed stars was considered to be a diapason—the most perfect harmonic interval. The following arrangement is most generally accepted for the musical intervals of the planets between the earth and the sphere of the fixed stars: From the sphere of the earth to the sphere of the moon, one tone; from the sphere of the moon to that of Mercury, one-half tone; from Mercury to Venus, one-half tone; from Venus to the sun, one and one-half tones; from the sun to Mars, one tone; from Mars to Jupiter, one-half tone; from Jupiter to Saturn, one-half tone; from Saturn to the fixed stars, one-half tone. The sum of these intervals equals the six whole tones of the octave.



## The Sophists

- Scorned pre-Socratic speculation about atoms and elements as irrelevant.
- They were teachers who emphasized practical skills, such as public speaking, the art of rhetoric.

*“Man is the measure of all things.”*

-- Protagoras

## Hellenic Philosophers: The Big Three

1. Socrates (470-399 BC.)
2. Plato (427-347 BC.)
3. Aristotle (384-322 BC.)

Timeline 3.1 PHASES OF HELLENIC HISTORY All dates B.C.

479	460	431	404		323
Delian League	Wars in Greece and with Persia	Thirty Years' Peace	Peloponnesian War	Spartan and Theban Hegemony	Triumph of Macedonia

## Socrates (470-399 B.C.)

- A 'gadfly'.
- Opposed the Sophist tendency to undermine traditional values without offering new ones in their place.
- Like them, he didn't think about nature, and focused instead on human issues and empowering individuals to make their own moral choices.
- Unlike them, he believed that an enduring moral order existed in the universe.

## The Wisest Man in Athens

- One of Socrates' students went to the Oracle at Delphi and asked, "Is Socrates the wisest man in Athens?"
- The answer was an unambiguous, "Yes."
- Socrates set out to prove that answer wrong, but ended up concluding that the oracle was correct because he at least knew what he didn't know.



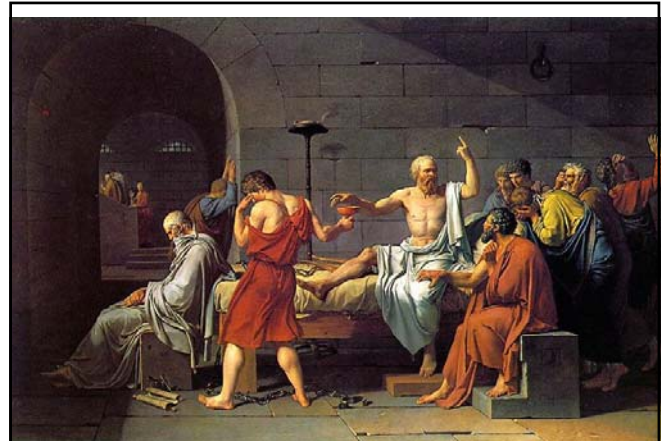
*“Virtue is knowledge.”*  
--Socrates

- The *Socratic method*
- Taught that a person who acquires truth through personal struggle to self-enlightenment will not commit evil deeds.
- His belief in the essential goodness of human nature became a central tenet of Western thought.

## What is justice?

Just: consistent with what is morally right; righteous

- How would the sophists determine what is just?
  - How does this relate to Athenian democracy?
- How would Socrates determine what is just?
- Do you want to live in a just society?
  - How should society determine what is morally correct?



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trial\\_of\\_Socrates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trial_of_Socrates)

## Plato (427-347 B.C.)

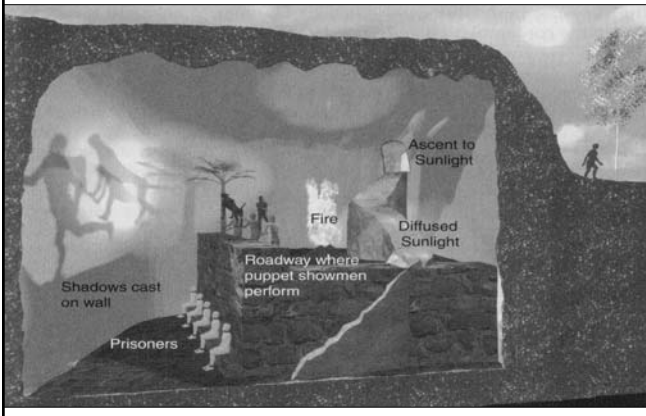


- Disciple of Socrates
- Author of the *Socratic Dialogues*
  - Socrates never wrote anything. Are Socrates' words in the *Dialogues* his own? or Plato's?
- Platonism was premised on the belief that there exists the physical world, but also the world of Forms, or Ideas.
  - Everything in our world is an imperfect copy of its original form in the world of Ideas.

## *The Allegory of the Cave*

- Allegory: a story, poem, or picture with an underlying meaning as well as the literal one.
- The Allegory is found in Plato's *Republic*, one of his later Socratic Dialogues.
- In the Allegory, Plato describes the journey from experiencing the world that our senses tell us is real, into the world of Forms that one sees with the 'mind's eye'.
- By doing so, he is also showing what he believes to be the philosopher's proper place in society.

## Plato's Cave



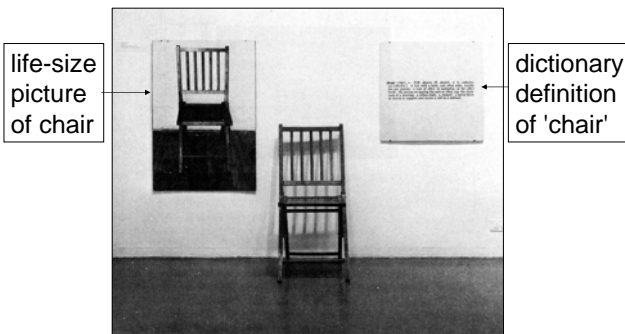
## Excerpt from *The Republic*, Book 7

... the [cave] is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and ... the journey upward [is] the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world...

... in the world of knowledge [outside the cave] **the idea of good** appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort;

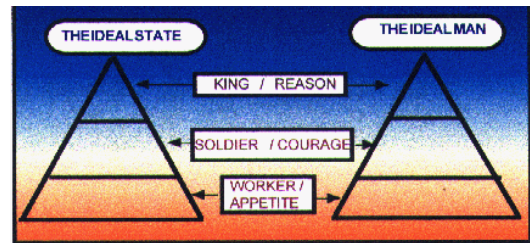
... he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed [on the idea of good].

How is this work of conceptual art related to Plato's philosophy of forms? Which one is the real chair?

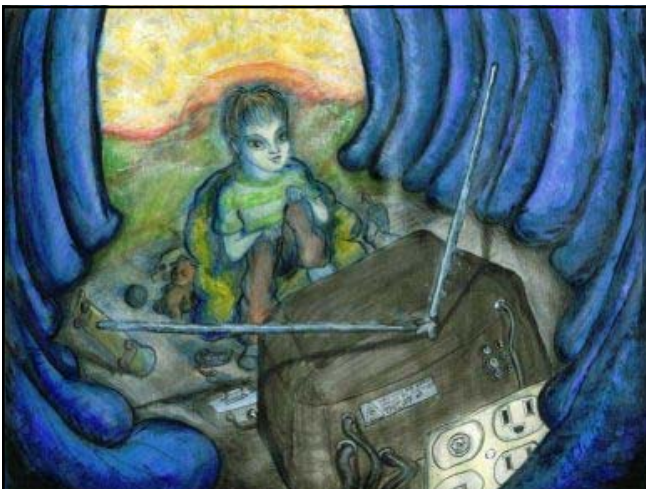


[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One\\_and\\_Three\\_Chairs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_and_Three_Chairs)

In *The Republic*, Plato described what he believed was the ideal state.



Who did Plato think was an ideal man?  
Who did Plato think should be King?



What do the lives of the following people have in common with the journey (stages of learning) described in the allegory of the cave?

- Socrates
- Jesus
- Buddha
- Gandhi
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Stages of Learning in the *Allegory*

1. Chained in one's seat, facing the wall of shadows, unquestioning.
2. Something happens to free one from the chains. Seeing that the shadows on the wall are not truth.
3. Exiting the cave, seeing truth, becoming enlightened.
4. Returning to the cave to teach and free the other prisoners.
5. Reaction of the prisoners to the teachings.

## Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)



- Student of Plato, tutor of Alexander.
- Believed the natural world was the only world; nature could be studied via the empirical method.
- Over time, his books became the final word on the subjects he wrote about:
  - *Metaphysics*, *Biology*, *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*
  - Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is an ancient Greek treatise on the art of persuasion.

## Rhetoric - Syllogisms

- A syllogism is a form of reasoning consisting of two premises and a conclusion.
  - All men are mortal; Aristotle is a man; therefore Aristotle is mortal.
- Aristotle classified 256 kinds of syllogisms, but found only 24 of them valid.
  - An invalid syllogism is an example of a fallacy of reasoning.

## Fallacies of Reasoning

- *Ad Hominem* Argument
- Argument from Authority
- Arguing in a Circle
- Argument from Ignorance
- False Dilemma
- Slippery Slope
- Straw Man Argument
- Genetic Fallacy

Plato founded one of the earliest known organized schools in Western civilization, the Academy. Aristotle later founded his own school, the Lyceum.



*The School of Athens*, fresco by Raphael, 1511.



Plato and Aristotle:

Who is pointing up? Who is pointing down? Why?

## What does this quote mean?

*The [person] who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason. . .*

- Bertrand Russell

## Timeline of Ancient Greece

- Greek Dark Ages (c.1100-750 BC)
  - Loss of writing, time of Homer.
- The Archaic Period (c.750-480 BC)
  - Many small self-governing communities rise, a Greek alphabet is adopted from the Phoenicians. Ends with Greek triumph in the Persian Wars, which begins the...
- Hellenic (Classical) Age (c. 480-323 BC)
  - Peak of Greek power and culture, lead by Athens until Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War, then Sparta and Thebes. This age ends with Alexander's conquest of Greece.
- The Hellenistic Period (323-146 BC)
  - From the death of Alexander to Roman conquest.

## Philosophy in the Hellenistic Age

- Skepticism
- Epicureanism      *Autarky & Ataraxia*
- Cynicism
- Stoicism

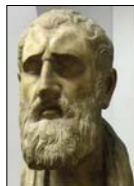
Although contradictory of each other, these schools of thought had a common appeal: the promise of a stable belief system and inner peace in the face of a hostile and chaotic environment.

## Skepticism

- Skeptics argued that the senses were unreliable sources of knowledge and therefore nothing could be known for certain.
- Their only certainty – that truth was unknowable...

## Stoicism

- Stoics believed in a supreme deity who was one and the same with nature and reason.
- The Stoic God, being identical to reason, gave a spark to each mortal's soul, conferring the twin gifts of rationality and kinship with divinity.
- The ideal stoic would overcome inherent fatalistic tendencies by doing one's duty, thus achieving virtue and freedom from corrupting emotions.



Zeno of Citium  
334 - 262 BC

## The Legacy of Hellenic Greece

- The Classical Aesthetic:
  - Their appreciation of beauty in the arts, especially with regard to sculpture and architecture.
  - The principles of Classicism – balance, simplicity, harmonious proportion, restraint, and order.
- Greek mythology and religion.
- The study of history: esp. Herodotus and Thucydides.
- Greek theater: drama, tragedy, and comedy.
- Philosophy: esp. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
- Democracy and the individual, skeptical spirit that was rooted in it.