



*From Cosmic Inquiry to the Science
of Human Existence*

ORIGINS • SCHOOLS • LEGACY

THE 6TH CENTURY BCE

The Greek Miracle: *Origins of Philosophy*

- **Intellectual Awakening:** A decisive shift from mythological explanations (like those of Homer and Hesiod) to rational inquiry and observation.
- **Triumph of Reason:** The "Greek Miracle" symbolized the victory of logic (Logos) over superstition and divine intervention.
- **The Polis Context:** Social and political crises in city-states like Miletus fostered an environment of debate, rule of law, and free inquiry.
- **From Mythos to Logos:** Thinkers began to explain the universe through natural elements rather than the whims of gods.



THE FIRST PHILOSOPHERS
The Milesian School

Emerging in the Ionian city of Miletus (Asia Minor), these thinkers sought the *Archê* (fundamental principle) of the cosmos,

replacing myth with natural law •

Anaximenes

C. 585 – C. 528 BCE

Proposed a mechanism for change, attempting to explain *how* the primary substance transforms into other elements.

Principle: Air
Through rarefaction (becoming fire) and condensation (becoming wind, cloud, water, earth), air forms the cosmos.

- **Thales**
- **C. 624 – C. 546 BCE**
- Often regarded as the **first Greek philosopher**. He broke away from mythological explanations to propose natural causes.
- **Principle: Water**
He believed water or moisture was the primary substance from which all things originated and to which they return.
- **Anaximander**
- **C. 610 – C. 546 BCE**
- A student of Thales who argued that the origin could not be a specific material like water, as it limits the potential for opposites.
- **Principle: The Apeiron**
The "Boundless" or "Indefinite" — an eternal, ageless substance from which opposites (hot/cold, wet/dry) emerge.

*the other, the division of
a line into extreme and
mean ratio."*

Pythagoras

of Samos

c. 570 – c. 495 BCE

Born on the island of Samos, Pythagoras migrated to Croton in southern Italy where he founded a secretive religious-philosophical brotherhood. His school combined mysticism with mathematics, influencing Plato and Western thought profoundly.

Metempsychosis (Transmigration)

Influenced by Orphism, he taught that the soul is immortal and passes into other bodies (human or animal) after death until purified.

Harmonia & Numbers

Believed that "all things are number." Discovered that musical intervals correspond to simple whole-number ratios, suggesting a cosmic order.

Ethics & The Mean

Taught a way of life based on moderation, dietary restrictions (vegetarianism), and the pursuit of harmony in the soul.

The Sophists

Teachers of Rhetoric & Practical Wisdom

- *Man is the measure of all things.*
- ”
- **PROTAGORAS**
- First & Most Prominent Sophist
- *Asserting that truth is subjective and relative to the individual, challenging absolute divine authority.*
- **The Intellectual Revolution**
- **Rise of Democracy:** Flourished in democratic Athens where public speaking and persuasion were keys to power.
- **Professional Educators:** Unlike earlier philosophers, they charged fees to teach rhetoric (the art of persuasion) to young citizens.
- **Skepticism & Relativism:** Questioned traditional religious beliefs and absolute moral truths.
- **Focus on Human Affairs:** Shifted inquiry from the cosmos (nature) to human society, politics, and language.
- **KEY CONCEPTS:**
- **RHETORIC RELATIVISM SKEPTICISM CIVIC VIRTUE INDIVIDUALISM**

BEFORE SOCRATES

Pre-Socratic Thinkers

The Turn from Myth to Mechanism

- **Anaxagoras**
- **CLAZOMENAE • BROUGHT PHILOSOPHY TO ATHENS**
- *"Everything is in everything."*
- **KEY CONTRIBUTIONS****Conservation of Matter:** Matter cannot be created or destroyed, only rearranged.
- **Nous (Mind):** Introduced the concept of a cosmic Mind that orders and separates the chaotic mixture of ingredients.
- **Cosmology:** The universe consists of infinite mixtures of
- **Democritus**
- **ABDERA • THE LAUGHING PHILOSOPHER**
- *"Nothing exists except atoms and empty space."*
- **KEY CONTRIBUTIONS****Atomism:** All matter consists of tiny, indivisible, indestructible particles called *atomos*.
- **The Void:** Atoms move constantly through empty space, colliding and combining.

Socrates

The Moral Philosopher

c. 470 – 399 BCE

- A pivotal figure who shifted philosophy from the study of the cosmos to human existence. He wrote nothing himself; his life and methods are known primarily through the dialogues of his student, Plato.
- **The Socratic Method**
- A form of cooperative argumentative dialogue (elenchus) based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and expose contradictions in beliefs.
- **Ethics & Knowledge**
- Believed that "virtue is knowledge" —if one truly knows what is right, one will act rightly. He sought objective definitions of virtues like justice and courage.
- **Trial & Execution**
- Accused of impiety and corrupting the youth. He chose death by drinking hemlock rather than exile, affirming his loyalty to the laws of Athens.

Socrates,
Teacher of
Aristotle
c. 427 – 347 BCE

- Founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the West. Plato's dialogues laid the foundations of Western philosophy, moving from Socratic ethics to a comprehensive system of metaphysics and politics.
- **Theory of Forms (Ideas)**
- The material world is a shadow of true reality. Perfect, eternal "Forms" exist beyond sensory experience and can only be grasped by the intellect.
- **The Ideal State (The Republic)**
- Proposed a tripartite society of Producers, Guardians, and Rulers. Justice is achieved when each class performs its function in harmony.
- **Philosopher-Kings**
- "Until philosophers represent kings, or kings philosophize... cities will have no rest from their evils." Wisdom justifies authority.

Aristotle

The Systematizer

384 – 322 BCE

- A student of Plato who founded the Lyceum. Unlike his teacher, Aristotle grounded his philosophy in the observable world, laying the foundations for logic, biology, and scientific inquiry.
- **Empirical Observation**
- Rejected independent Forms. Believed knowledge begins with sensory experience and the study of the natural world (the Lyceum).
- **Teleology**
- The concept that everything in nature has a purpose or final cause toward which it moves to fulfill its potential.
- **Politics & Ethics**
- Defined humans as "political animals." Advocated for a mixed constitution combining monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy for stability.

THE GREAT DIVERGENCE

Plato vs. Aristotle

Idealism vs. Empiricism in Ancient Thought

Plato	Aristotle	
SCHOOL	The Academy Focus on mathematics & abstract reasoning	The Lyceum Focus on natural science & observation
REALITY	World of Forms True reality is abstract, eternal, and non-material (Ideas).	Material World Reality is found in substance (matter + form) within nature.
KNOWLEDGE	Reason & Intellect Knowledge is "recollection" of Forms; senses are deceptive.	Empiricism Knowledge begins with sensory experience processed by reason.
POLITICS	Philosopher-Kings Ideal utopian state with strict class hierarchy (Republic).	Balanced Constitution Mixed government (Polity) ruled by law and middle class.
METHOD	Dialectic Dialogue and logical argumentation to reach truth.	Syllogism & Observation Deductive logic combined with biological classification.

THE ENDURING IMPACT

Legacy of Greek Philosophy

Foundations of Western Thought

From Cosmos to Ethics

Shifted the focus of inquiry from the mechanical structure of the universe (Pre-Socratics) to the profound questions of human behavior, virtue, and political organization (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle).

- Foundations of Western philosophy, science, political theory -

Athens as Intellectual Crucible

Established the model of the academy and free inquiry. The democratic environment of Athens fostered debate, logic, and the systematic examination of ideas that became the hallmark of Western education.

- Enduring triad: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle

Water as Arche

Pythagoras

c. 570 BCE

Mathematics & Mysticism

Theorem $a^2+b^2=c^2$

Anaxagoras

c. 500 BCE

Brought philosophy to Athens

Mind (Nous)

Socrates

c. 470 BCE

Birth of the Moral Philosopher

Democritus

c. 460 BCE

Atomic Theory

The Laughing Philosopher

Plato

c. 427 BCE

Founder of the Academy

Theory of Forms

Death of Socrates

399 BCE

Trial and Execution

Turning Point

Aristotle

384 BCE

The Lyceum

Logic & Biology