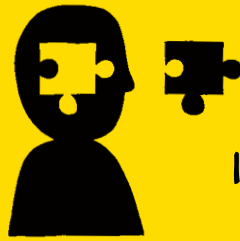




MIND
HAS NO
GENDER



WE ONLY THINK WHEN
WE ARE CONFRONTED
WITH PROBLEMS



IMAGINATION
DECIDES
EVERYTHING



THE UNIVERSE
HAS NOT ALWAYS
EXISTED



I THINK
THEREFORE
I AM



TO BE IS TO BE
PERCEIVED

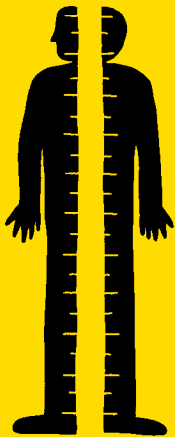


MAN WAS BORN FREE,
YET EVERYWHERE
HE IS IN CHAINS



MAN IS
AN ANIMAL
THAT MAKES
BARGAINS

MAN IS THE
MEASURE OF
ALL THINGS



THE PHILOSOPHY BOOK



MAN IS A
MACHINE

BIG IDEAS SIMPLY EXPLAINED

HAPPY IS HE WHO
HAS OVERCOME
HIS EGO



MAN IS AN
INVENTION OF
RECENT DATE



THE END JUSTIFIES
THE MEANS



THERE IS
NOTHING
OUTSIDE OF
THE TEXT



ACT AS IF WHAT
YOU DO MAKES
A DIFFERENCE



LIFE WILL BE LIVED
ALL THE BETTER IF
IT HAS NO MEANING



OVER HIS OWN
BODY AND MIND,
THE INDIVIDUAL
IS SOVEREIGN

THE
PHILOSOPHY
BOOK

THE PHILOSOPHY BOOK





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CONTRIBUTORS

WILL BUCKINGHAM

A philosopher, novelist, and lecturer, Will Buckingham is particularly interested in the interplay of philosophy and narrative. He currently teaches at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, and has written several books, including *Finding our Sea-Legs: Ethics, Experience and the Ocean of Stories*.

DOUGLAS BURNHAM

A professor of philosophy at Staffordshire University, UK, Douglas Burnham is the author of many books and articles on modern and European philosophy.

CLIVE HILL

A lecturer in political theory and British history, Clive Hill has a particular interest in the role of the intellectual in the modern world.

PETER J. KING

A doctor of philosophy who lectures at Pembroke College, University of Oxford, UK, Peter J. King is the author of the recent book *One Hundred Philosophers: A Guide to the World's Greatest Thinkers*.

JOHN MARENBON

A Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, UK, John Marenbon studies and writes on medieval philosophy. His books include *Early Medieval Philosophy 480–1150: An Introduction*.

MARCUS WEEKS

A writer and musician, Marcus Weeks studied philosophy and worked as a teacher before embarking on a career as an author. He has contributed to many books on the arts and popular sciences.

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

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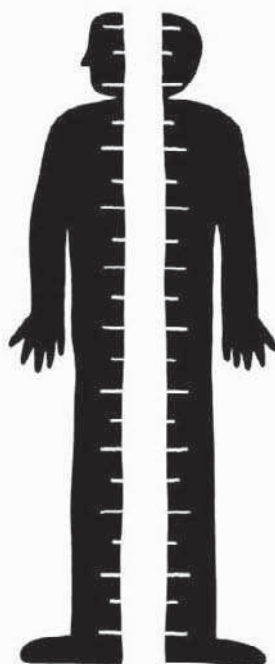
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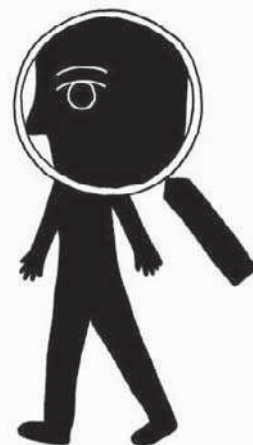
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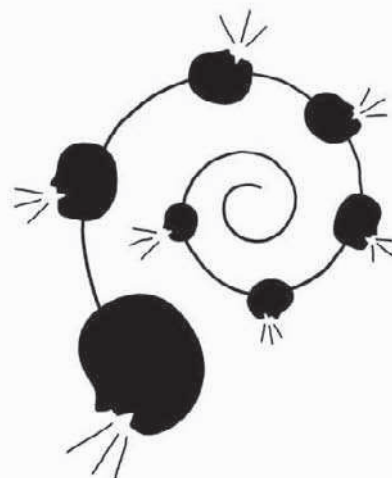
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INTRODU

CTION





Philosophy is not just the preserve of brilliant but eccentric thinkers that it is popularly supposed to be. It is what everyone does when they're not busy dealing with their everyday business and get a chance simply to wonder what life and the universe are all about. We human beings are naturally inquisitive creatures, and can't help wondering about the world around us and our place in it. We're also equipped with a powerful intellectual capability, which allows us to reason as well as just wonder. Although we may not realize it, whenever we reason, we're thinking philosophically.

Philosophy is not so much about coming up with the answers to fundamental questions as it is about the process of trying to find these answers, using reasoning rather than accepting without question conventional views or traditional authority. The very first philosophers, in ancient Greece and China, were thinkers who were not satisfied with the established explanations provided by religion and custom, and sought answers which had rational justifications. And, just as we might share our views with friends and colleagues, they discussed their ideas with one another, and even set up

"schools" to teach not just the conclusions they had come to, but the way they had come to them. They encouraged their students to disagree and criticize ideas as a means of refining them and coming up with new and different ones. A popular misconception is that of the solitary philosopher arriving at his conclusions in isolation, but this is actually seldom the case. New ideas emerge through discussion and the examination, analysis, and criticism of other people's ideas.

Debate and dialogue

The archetypical philosopher in this respect was Socrates. He didn't leave any writings, or even

any big ideas as the conclusions of his thinking. Indeed, he prided himself on being the wisest of men because he knew he didn't know anything. His legacy lay in the tradition he established of debate and discussion, of questioning the assumptions of other people to gain deeper understanding and elicit fundamental truths. The writings of Socrates' pupil, Plato, are almost invariably in the form of dialogues, with Socrates as a major character. Many later philosophers also adopted the device of dialogues to present their ideas, giving arguments and counterarguments rather than a simple statement of their reasoning and conclusions.

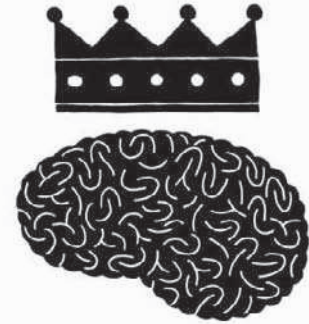
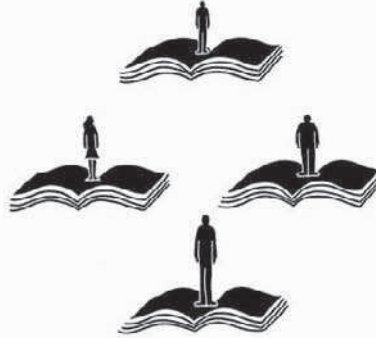
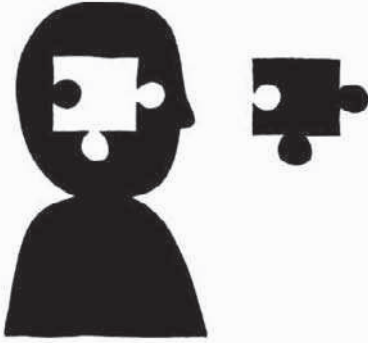
The philosopher who presents his ideas to the world is liable to be met with comments beginning "Yes, but ..." or "What if ..." rather than wholehearted acceptance. In fact, philosophers have fiercely disagreed with one another about almost every aspect of philosophy. Plato and his pupil Aristotle, for example, held diametrically opposed views on fundamental philosophical questions, and their different approaches have divided opinions among philosophers ever since. This has, in turn, provoked more discussion and prompted yet more fresh ideas.

“

Wonder is very much the affection of a philosopher; for there is no other beginning of philosophy than this.

Plato

”



But how can it be that these philosophical questions are still being discussed and debated? Why haven't thinkers come up with definitive answers? What are these "fundamental questions" that philosophers through the ages have wrestled with?

Existence and knowledge

When the first true philosophers appeared in ancient Greece some 2,500 years ago, it was the world around them that inspired their sense of wonder. They saw the Earth and all the different forms of life inhabiting it; the sun, moon, planets, and stars; and natural phenomena such as the weather, earthquakes, and eclipses. They sought explanations for all these things—not the traditional myths and legends about the gods, but something that would satisfy their curiosity and their intellect. The first question that occupied these early philosophers was "What is the universe made of?", which was soon expanded to become the wider question of "What is the nature of whatever it is that exists?"

This is the branch of philosophy we now call metaphysics. Although much of the original question has since been explained by modern science, related questions of

metaphysics such as "Why is there something rather than nothing?" are not so simply answered.

Because we, too, exist as a part of the universe, metaphysics also considers the nature of human existence and what it means to be a conscious being. How do we perceive the world around us, and do things exist independently of our perception? What is the relationship between our mind and body, and is there such a thing as an immortal soul? The area of metaphysics concerned with questions of existence, ontology, is a huge one and forms the basis for much of Western philosophy.

Once philosophers had started to put received wisdom to the test of rational examination, another fundamental question became obvious: "How can we know?" The study of the nature and limits of knowledge forms a second main branch of philosophy, epistemology.

At its heart is the question of how we acquire knowledge, how we come to know what we know; is some (or even all) knowledge innate, or do we learn everything from experience? Can we know something from reasoning alone? These questions are vital to philosophical thinking, as we need to be able to rely on our knowledge

in order to reason correctly. We also need to determine the scope and limits of our knowledge. Otherwise we cannot be sure that we actually do know what we think we know, and haven't somehow been "tricked" into believing it by our senses.

Logic and language

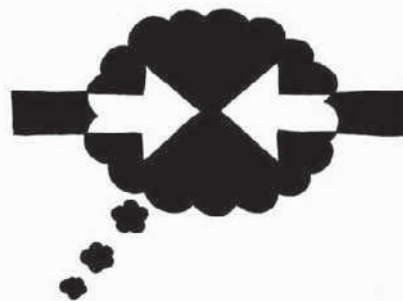
Reasoning relies on establishing the truth of statements, which can then be used to build up a train of thought leading to a conclusion. This might seem obvious to us now, but the idea of constructing a rational argument distinguished philosophy from the superstitious and religious explanations that had existed before the first philosophers. These thinkers had to devise a way of ensuring their ideas had validity. »

“

Superstition sets the whole world in flames; philosophy quenches them.

Voltaire

”



What emerged from their thinking was logic, a technique of reasoning that was gradually refined over time. At first simply a useful tool for analyzing whether an argument held water, logic developed rules and conventions, and soon became a field of study in its own right, another branch of the expanding subject of philosophy.

Like so much of philosophy, logic has intimate connections with science, and mathematics in particular. The basic structure of a logical argument, starting from a premise and working through a series of steps to a conclusion, is the same as that of a mathematical proof. It's not surprising then that philosophers have often turned to mathematics for examples of self-evident, incontrovertible truths, nor that many of the greatest thinkers, from Pythagoras to René Descartes and Gottfried Leibniz, were also accomplished mathematicians.

Although logic might seem to be the most exact and "scientific" branch of philosophy, a field where things are either right or wrong, a closer look at the subject shows that it is not so simple. Advances in mathematics in the 19th century called into question the rules of logic that had been laid down by Aristotle, but even in ancient times

Zeno of Elea's famous paradoxes reached absurd conclusions from apparently faultless arguments.

A large part of the problem is that philosophical logic, unlike mathematics, is expressed in words rather than numbers or symbols, and is subject to all the ambiguities and subtleties inherent in language. Constructing a reasoned argument involves using language carefully and accurately, examining our statements and arguments to make sure they mean what we think they mean; and when we study other people's arguments, we have to analyze not only the logical steps they take, but also the language they use, to see if their conclusions hold water. Out of this process came yet another field of philosophy that flourished in the 20th century, the philosophy of language, which examined terms and their meanings.

Morality, art, and politics

Because our language is imprecise, philosophers have attempted to clarify meanings in their search for answers to philosophical questions. The sort of questions that Socrates asked the citizens of Athens tried to get to the bottom of what they actually believed certain concepts to be. He would ask seemingly simple questions such as "What is

justice?" or "What is beauty?" not only to elicit meanings, but also to explore the concepts themselves. In discussions of this sort, Socrates challenged assumptions about the way we live our lives and the things we consider to be important.

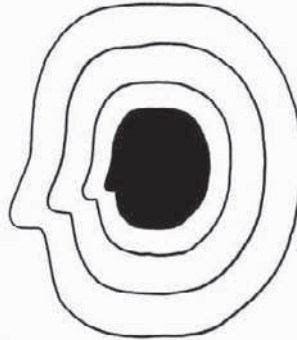
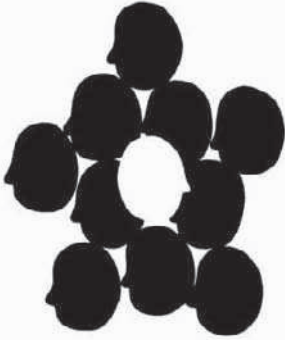
The examination of what it means to lead a "good" life, what concepts such as justice and happiness actually mean and how we can achieve them, and how we should behave, forms the basis for the branch of philosophy known as ethics (or moral philosophy); and the related branch stemming from the question of what constitutes beauty and art is known as aesthetics.

“

O philosophy, life's guide!
O searcher-out of virtue
and expeller of vices!
What could we and every
age of men have been
without thee?

Cicero

”



From considering ethical questions about our individual lives, it is a natural step to start thinking about the sort of society we would like to live in—how it should be governed, the rights and responsibilities of its citizens, and so on. Political philosophy, the last of the major branches of philosophy, deals with these ideas, and philosophers have come up with models of how they believe society should be organized, ranging from Plato's *Republic* to Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.

Religion: East and West

The various branches of philosophy are not only interlinked, but overlap considerably, and it is sometimes difficult to say in which area a particular idea falls. Philosophy also encroaches on many completely different subjects, including the sciences, history, and the arts. With its beginnings in questioning the dogmas of religion and superstition, philosophy also examines religion itself, specifically asking questions such as “Does god exist?” and “Do we have an immortal soul?” These are questions that have their roots in metaphysics, but they have implications in ethics too. For example, some philosophers have asked whether our morality comes from god or whether it is a purely

human construct—and this in turn has raised the whole debate as to what extent humanity has free will.

In the Eastern philosophies that evolved in China and India (particularly Daoism and Buddhism) the lines between philosophy and religion are less clear, at least to Western ways of thinking. This marks one of the major differences between Western and Eastern philosophies. Although Eastern philosophies are not generally a result of divine revelation or religious dogma, they are often intricately linked with what we would consider matters of faith. Even though philosophical reasoning is frequently used to justify faith in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic world, faith and belief

form an integral part of Eastern philosophy that has no parallel in the West. Eastern and Western philosophy also differ in their starting points. Where the ancient Greeks posed metaphysical questions, the first Chinese philosophers considered these adequately dealt with by religion, and instead concerned themselves with moral and political philosophy.

Following the reasoning

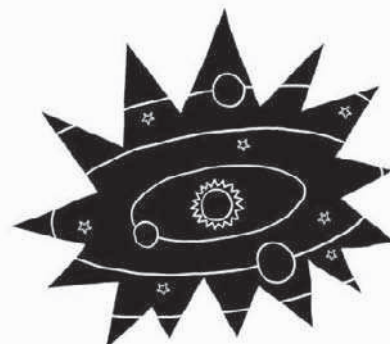
Philosophy has provided us with some of the most important and influential ideas in history. What this book presents is a collection of ideas from the best-known philosophers, encapsulated in well known quotes and pithy summaries of their ideas. Perhaps the best-known quotation in philosophy is Descartes' “cogito, ergo sum” (often translated from the Latin as “I think, therefore I am”). It ranks as one of the most important ideas in the history of philosophy, and is widely considered a turning point in thinking, leading us into the modern era. On its own however, the quotation doesn't mean much. It is the conclusion of a line of argument about the nature of certainty, and only when we examine the reasoning leading to it does the idea begin to make sense. And »



There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

William Shakespeare





it's only when we see where Descartes took the idea—what the consequences of that conclusion are—that we see its importance.

Many of the ideas in this book may seem puzzling at first glance. Some may appear self-evident, others paradoxical or flying in the face of common sense. They might even appear to prove Bertrand Russell's flippant remark that “the point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.” So why are these ideas important?

Systems of thought

Sometimes the theories presented in this book were the first of their kind to appear in the history of thought. While their conclusions may seem obvious to us now, in hindsight, they were startlingly new in their time, and despite their apparent simplicity, they may make us reexamine things that we take for granted. The theories presented here that seem to be paradoxes and counter-intuitive statements are the ideas that really call into question our assumptions about ourselves and the world—and they also make us think in new ways about how we see things. There are many

ideas here that raise issues that philosophers still puzzle over. Some ideas may relate to other thoughts and theories in different fields of the same philosopher's thinking, or have come from an analysis or criticism of another philosopher's work. These latter ideas form part of a line of reasoning that may extend over several generations or even centuries, or be the central idea of a particular “school” of philosophy.

Many of the great philosophers formed integrated “systems” of philosophy with interconnecting ideas. For example, their opinions about how we acquire knowledge led to a particular metaphysical view of the universe and man's soul. This in turn has implications for what kind of life the philosopher believes we should lead and what type of society would be ideal. And in turn, this entire system of ideas has been the starting point for subsequent philosophers.

We must remember too that these ideas never quite become outdated. They still have much to tell us, even when their conclusions have been proved wrong by subsequent philosophers and scientists. In fact, many ideas that had been dismissed for centuries were later to be proved startlingly

prescient—the theories of the ancient Greek atomists for example. More importantly, these thinkers established the processes of philosophy, ways of thinking and organizing our thoughts. We must remember that these ideas are only a small part of a philosopher's thinking—usually the conclusion to a longer line of reasoning.

Science and society

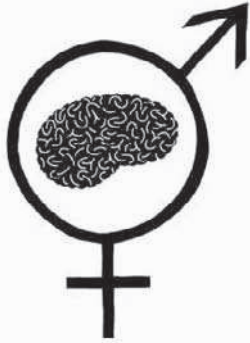
These ideas spread their influence beyond philosophy too. Some have spawned mainstream scientific, political, or artistic movements. Often the relationship between science and philosophy is a back-and-forth affair, with ideas from one informing the other. Indeed, there is a whole branch of philosophy that studies the thinking behind

“

Scepticism is the first step towards truth.

Denis Diderot

”



scientific methods and practices. The development of logical thinking affected how math evolved and became the basis for the scientific method, which relies on systematic observation to explain the world. Ideas about the nature of the self and consciousness have developed into the science of psychology.

The same is true of philosophy's relationship with society. Ethics of all sorts found adherents in political leaders throughout history, shaping the societies we live in today, and even prompting revolutions. The ethical decisions made in all kinds of professions have moral dimensions that are informed by the ideas of the great thinkers of philosophy.

Behind the ideas

The ideas in this book have come from people living in societies and cultures which have shaped those ideas. As we examine the ideas, we get a picture of certain national and regional characteristics, as well as a flavor of the times they lived in.

The philosophers presented here emerge as distinct personalities—some thinkers are optimistic, others pessimistic; some are meticulous and painstaking, others think in broad sweeps; some express themselves in clear, precise language, others in a poetic way,

and still more in dense, abstract language that takes time to unpick. If you read these ideas in the original texts, you will not only agree or disagree with the what they say, and follow the reasoning by which they reached their conclusions, but also get a feeling of what kind of person is behind it. You might, for example, warm to the witty and charming Hume, appreciating his beautifully clear prose, while not altogether feeling at home with what he has to say; or find Schopenhauer both persuasive and a delight to read, while getting the distinct feeling that he was not a particularly likeable man.

Above all these thinkers were (and still are) interesting and stimulating. The best were also great writers too, and reading their original writings can be as rewarding as reading literature; we can appreciate not just their literary style, but also their philosophical style, the way they present their arguments. As well as being thought-provoking, it can be as uplifting as great art, as elegant as a mathematical proof, and as witty as an after-dinner speaker.

Philosophy is not simply about ideas—it's a way of thinking. There are frequently no right or wrong answers, and different philosophers

often come to radically different conclusions in their investigations into questions that science cannot—and religion does not—explain.

Enjoying philosophy

If wonder and curiosity are human attributes, so too are the thrill of exploration and the joy of discovery. We can gain the same sort of “buzz” from philosophy that we might get from physical activity, and the same pleasure that we enjoy from an appreciating the arts. Above all, we gain the satisfaction of arriving at beliefs and ideas that are not handed down or forced upon us by society, teachers, religion, or even philosophers, but through our own individual reasoning. ■

“

The beginning of thought is in disagreement—not only with others but also with ourselves.

Eric Hoffer

”

THE ANG WORLD

700 BCE—250 CE



IENT



Thales of Miletus, the first known Greek philosopher, seeks **rational answers** to questions about the world we live in.



624–546 BCE

Traditional date of birth of **Kong Fuzi (Confucius)**, whose philosophy is centered on **respect and tradition**.



551 BCE

Death of **Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha**, founder of the religion and philosophy of **Buddhism**.



480 BCE

Empedocles proposes his theory of the **four Classical elements**; he is the last Greek philosopher to record his ideas in **verse**.



c.460 BCE

569 BCE



Birth of **Pythagoras**, the Greek thinker who combined philosophy and mathematics.

508 BCE



The powerful Greek city-state of Athens adopts a **democratic constitution**.

469 BCE



Birth of **Socrates**, whose **methods of questioning** in Athens formed the basis for much of later Western philosophy.

404 BCE



Defeat in the **Peloponnesian War** leads to the decline of Athens' political power.

From the beginning of human history, people have asked questions about the world and their place within it. For early societies, the answers to the most fundamental questions were found in religion: the actions of the gods explained the workings of the universe, and provided a framework for human civilizations.

Some people, however, found the traditional religious explanations inadequate, and they began to search for answers based on reason rather than convention or religion. This shift marked the birth of philosophy, and the first of the great thinkers that we know of was Thales of Miletus—Miletus was a Greek settlement in modern-day Turkey. Thales used reason to inquire into the nature of the universe, and encouraged others to do likewise.

He passed on to his followers not only his answers, but the process of thinking rationally, together with an idea of what kind of explanations could be considered satisfactory. For this reason Thales is generally regarded as the first philosopher.

The main concern of the early philosophers centered around Thales' basic question: "What is the world made of?" Their answers form the foundations of scientific thought, and forged a relationship between science and philosophy that still exists today. The work of Pythagoras marked a key turning point, as he sought to explain the world not in terms of primal matter, but in terms of mathematics. He and his followers described the structure of the cosmos in numbers and geometry. Although some of these mathematical relationships

acquired mystical significance for Pythagoras and his followers, their numerical explanation of the cosmos had a profound influence on the beginnings of scientific thought.

Classical Greek philosophy

As the Greek city-states grew in stature, philosophy spread across the Greek world from Ionia, and in particular to Athens, which was rapidly becoming the cultural center of Greece. It was here that philosophers broadened the scope of philosophy to include new questions, such as "How do we know what we know?" and "How should we live our lives?" It was an Athenian, Socrates, who ushered in the short but hugely influential period of Classical Greek philosophy. Although he left no writings, his ideas were so important that they steered the

Plato founds his hugely influential **Academy** in Athens.



c.385 BCE

Zeno of Citium formulates his **stoic philosophy**, which goes on to find favor in the Roman Empire.



c.332–265 BCE

Ptolemy, a Roman citizen of Egypt, proposes the idea that **Earth is at the center of the universe** and does not move.



c.100–178 CE

Galen of Pergamum produces extraordinary **medical research** that remains unsurpassed until the work of Vesalius in 1543.



c.150 BCE

335 BCE



Aristotle, Plato's student, opens his own school in Athens—the **Lyceum**.

323 BCE



The **death of Alexander the Great** signals the end of the cultural and political dominance of Greece in the ancient world.

122 CE



Construction begins on **Hadrian's Wall** in Britain, marking the northernmost border of the Roman Empire.

220 CE



The collapse of the **Han Dynasty** marks the end of a unified China. The **Period of Disunity** begins.

future course of philosophy, and all philosophers before him became known as the pre-socratics. His pupil Plato founded a philosophical school in Athens called the Academy (from which the word “academic” derives) where he taught and developed his master’s ideas, passing them on to students such as Aristotle, who was a pupil and teacher there for 20 years. The contrasting ideas and methods of these great thinkers—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—form the basis of Western philosophy as we know it today, and their differences of opinion have continued to divide philosophers throughout history.

The Classical period of ancient Greece effectively came to an end with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE. This great leader had unified Greece, and Greek city-states that had worked together

once again became rivals. Following the death of Aristotle in 322 BCE, philosophy also divided into very different schools of thought, as the cynics, sceptics, epicureans, and stoics argued their positions.

Over the next couple of centuries, Greek culture waned as the Roman Empire grew. The Romans had little time for Greek philosophy apart from stoicism, but Greek ideas persisted, mainly because they were preserved in the manuscripts and translations of the Arab world. They resurfaced later, during medieval times, with the rise of Christianity and Islam.

Eastern philosophies

Thinkers throughout Asia were also questioning conventional wisdom. Political upheaval in China from 771 to 481 BCE led to a collection of

philosophies that were less concerned with the nature of the universe than with how best to organize a just society and provide moral guidelines for the individuals within it; in the process examining what constitutes a “good” life. The so-called “Hundred Schools of Thought” flourished in this period, and the most significant of these were Confucianism and Daoism, both of which continued to dominate Chinese philosophy until the 20th century.

To the south of China an equally influential philosopher appeared: Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha. From his teaching in northern India around 500 BCE, his philosophy spread across the subcontinent and over most of southern Asia, where it is still widely practiced. ■



EVERYTHING IS MADE OF WATER

THALES OF MILETUS (c.624–546 BCE)

IN CONTEXT

BRANCH
Metaphysics

APPROACH
Monism

BEFORE

2500–900 BCE The Minoan civilization in Crete and the later Mycenaean civilization in Greece rely on religion to explain physical phenomena.

c.1100 BCE The Babylonian creation myth, *Enûma Eliš*, describes the primal state of the world as a watery mass.

c.700 BCE *Theogony* by the Greek poet Hesiod relates how the gods created the universe.

AFTER

Early 5th century BCE Empedocles proposes the four basic elements of the cosmos: earth, water, air, and fire.

c.400 BCE Leucippus and Democritus conclude that the cosmos is made up solely of atoms and empty space.



From observation, Thales deduced that specific weather conditions, not appeals to the gods, led to a good harvest. Predicting a high yield of olives one year, he is said to have bought up all the local olive presses, then profited by renting them out to meet increased demand.

During the Archaic period (mid-8th–6th century BCE), the peoples of the Greek peninsula gradually settled into a group of city-states. They developed an alphabetical system of writing, as well as the beginnings of what is now recognized as Western philosophy. Previous civilizations had relied on religion to explain phenomena in the world around them; now a new breed of thinkers emerged, who attempted to find natural, rational explanations.

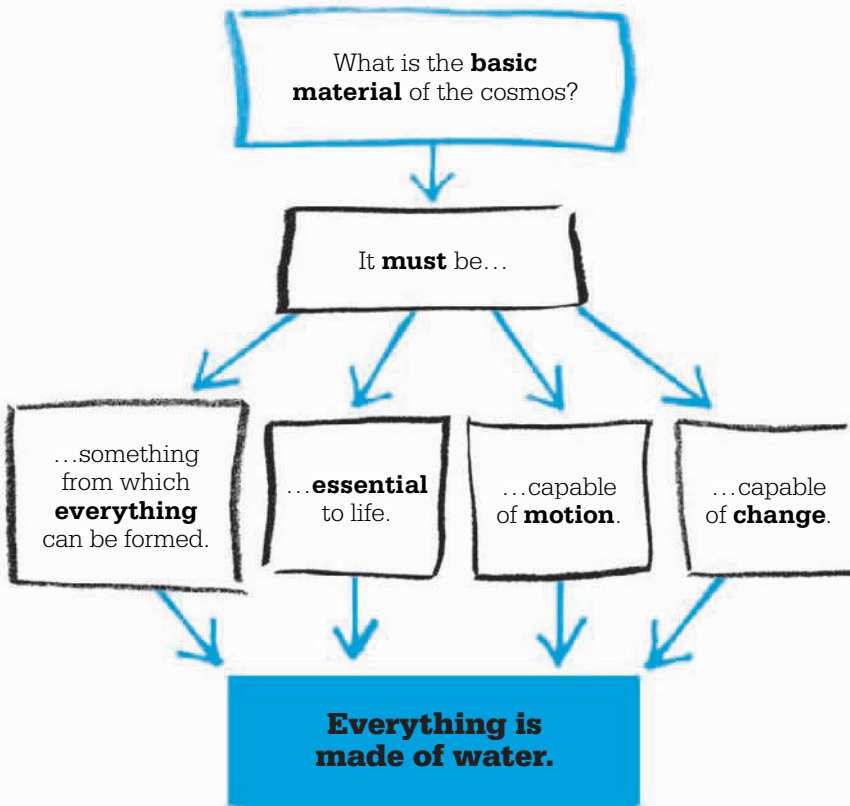
The first of these new scientific thinkers that we are aware of was Thales of Miletus. Nothing survives of his writings, but we know that he had a good grasp of geometry and astronomy, and is reputed to

have predicted the total eclipse of the sun in 585 BCE. This practical turn of mind led him to believe that events in the world were not due to supernatural intervention, but had natural causes that reason and observation would reveal.

Fundamental substance

Thales needed to establish a first principle from which to work, so he posed the question, “What is the basic material of the cosmos?” The idea that everything in the universe can be ultimately reduced to a single substance is the theory of monism, and Thales and his followers were the first to propose it within Western philosophy. Thales reasons that the fundamental

See also: Anaximander 330 ■ Anaximenes of Miletus 330 ■ Pythagoras 26–29 ■ Empedocles 330 ■ Democritus and Leucippus 45 ■ Aristotle 56–63

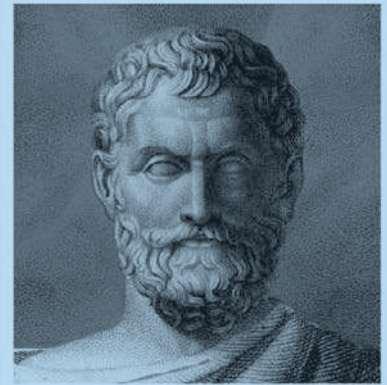


material of the universe had to be something out of which everything else could be formed, as well as being essential to life, and capable of motion and therefore of change. He observes that water is clearly necessary to sustain all forms of life, and that it moves and changes, assuming different forms – from liquid to solid ice and vaporous mist. So Thales concludes that all matter, regardless of its apparent properties, must be water in some stage of transformation.

Thales also notes that every landmass appears to come to an end at the water's edge. From this he deduces that the whole of the earth must be floating on a bed of water, from which it has emerged.

When anything occurs to cause ripples or tremors in this water, Thales states, we experience them as earthquakes.

However, as interesting as the details of Thales' theories are, they are not the main reason why he is considered a major figure in the history of philosophy. His true importance lies in the fact that he was the first known thinker to seek naturalistic, rational answers to fundamental questions, rather than to ascribe objects and events to the whims of capricious gods. By doing so, he and the later philosophers of the Milesian School laid the foundations for future scientific and philosophical thought across the Western world. ■



Thales of Miletus

Although we know that Thales was born and lived in Miletus, on the coast of what is now Turkey, we know very little about his life. None of his writings, if indeed he left any, have survived. However, his reputation as one of the key early Greek thinkers seems deserved, and he is referred to in some detail by both Aristotle and Diogenes Laertius, the 3rd-century biographer of the ancient Greek philosophers.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that as well as being a philosopher, Thales was actively involved in politics and was a very successful businessman. He is thought to have traveled widely around the eastern Mediterranean, and while visiting Egypt, to have learned the practical geometry that was to become the basis of his deductive reasoning.

However, Thales was above all a teacher, the first of the so-called Milesian School of philosophers. Anaximander, his pupil, expanded his scientific theories, and in turn became a mentor to Anaximenes, who is believed to have taught the young mathematician Pythagoras.



THE DAO THAT CAN BE TOLD IS NOT THE ETERNAL DAO

LAOZI (c.6TH CENTURY BCE)

IN CONTEXT

TRADITION

Chinese philosophy

APPROACH

Daoism

BEFORE

1600–1046 BCE During the Shang Dynasty, people believe fate is controlled by deities and practice ancestor worship.

1045–256 BCE Under the Zhou Dynasty, the Mandate of Heaven (god-given authority) justifies political decisions.

AFTER

5th century BCE Confucius (Kong Fuzi) sets out his rules for personal development and for ethical government.

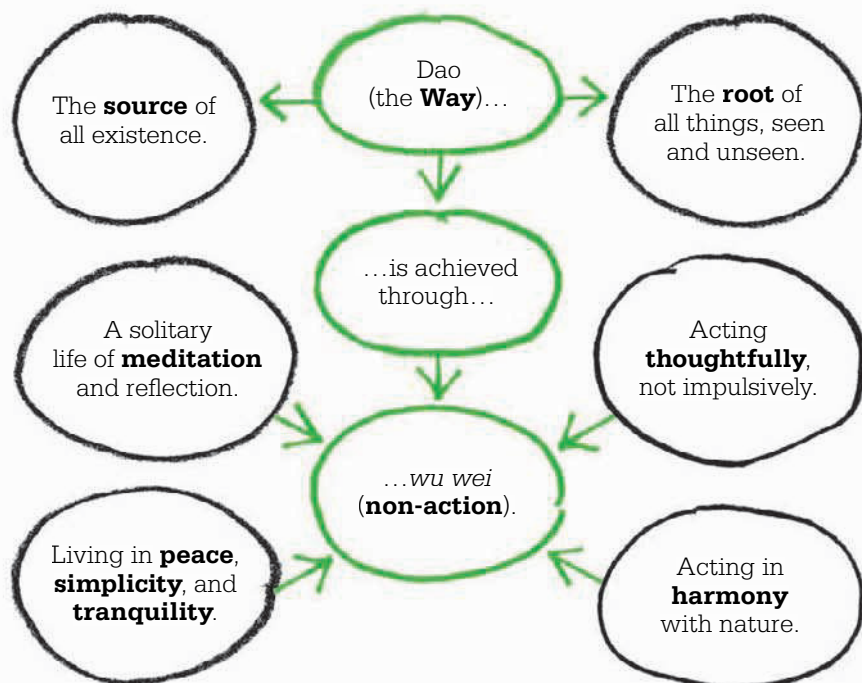
4th century BCE Philosopher Zhuangzi moves the focus of Daoist teaching more toward the actions of the individual, rather than those of the state.

3rd century CE Scholars Wang Bi and Guo Xiang create a Neo-Daoist school.

In the 6th century BCE, China moved toward a state of internal warfare as the ruling Zhou Dynasty disintegrated. This change bred a new social class of administrators and magistrates within the courts, who occupied themselves with the business of devising strategies for ruling more effectively. The large body of ideas

that was produced by these officials became known as the Hundred Schools of Thought.

All this coincided with the emergence of philosophy in Greece, and shared some of its concerns, such as seeking stability in a constantly changing world, and alternatives to what had previously been prescribed by religion. But



See also: Siddhartha Gautama 30–33 ■ Confucius 34–39 ■ Mozi 44 ■ Wang Bi 331 ■ Hajime Tanabe 244–45

Chinese philosophy evolved from practical politics and was therefore concerned with morality and ethics rather than the nature of the cosmos.

One of the most important ideas to appear at this time came from the *Daode jing* (*The Way and its Power*), which has been attributed to Laozi (Lao Tzu). It was one of the first attempts to propose a theory of just rule, based on *de* (virtue),



Living in harmony with nature is one path the *Daode jing* prescribes for a well-balanced life. For this man that could mean respecting the ecological balance of the lake and not over-fishing.

which could be found by following *dao* (the Way), and forms the basis of the philosophy known as Daoism.

Cycles of change

In order to understand the concept of *dao*, it is necessary to know how the ancient Chinese viewed the ever-changing world. For them, the changes are cyclical, continually moving from one state to another, such as from night to day, summer to winter, and so on. They saw the different states not as opposites, but as related, one arising from the other. These states also possess complementary properties that together make up a whole. The process of change is seen as an expression of *dao*, and leads to the 10,000 manifestations that make up the world. Laozi, in the *Daode jing*, says that humans are merely one of these 10,000 manifestations and have no special status. But because of our desire and free will, we can stray from the *dao*, and disturb the world's harmonious balance. To live a virtuous life means acting in accordance with the *dao*.

“

Knowing others
is intelligence; knowing
yourself is true wisdom.

Laozi

”

Following the *dao*, however, is not a simple matter, as the *Daode jing* acknowledges. Philosophizing about *dao* is pointless, as it is beyond anything that humans can conceive of. It is characterized by *wu* (“not-being”), so we can only live according to the *dao* by *wu wei*, literally “non-action.” By this Laozi does not mean “not doing”, but acting in accordance with nature—spontaneously and intuitively. That in turn entails acting without desire, ambition, or recourse to social conventions. ■

Laozi



So little is known for certain about the author of the *Daode jing*, who is traditionally assumed to be Laozi (Lao Tzu). He has become an almost mythical figure; it has even been suggested that the book was not by Laozi, but is in fact a compilation of sayings by a number of scholars. What we do know is that there was a scholar born in the state of Chu, with the name Li Er or Lao Tan, during the Zhou dynasty, who became known as Laozi (the Old Master). Several texts indicate that he was an archivist at the Zhou court, and that Confucius consulted him on

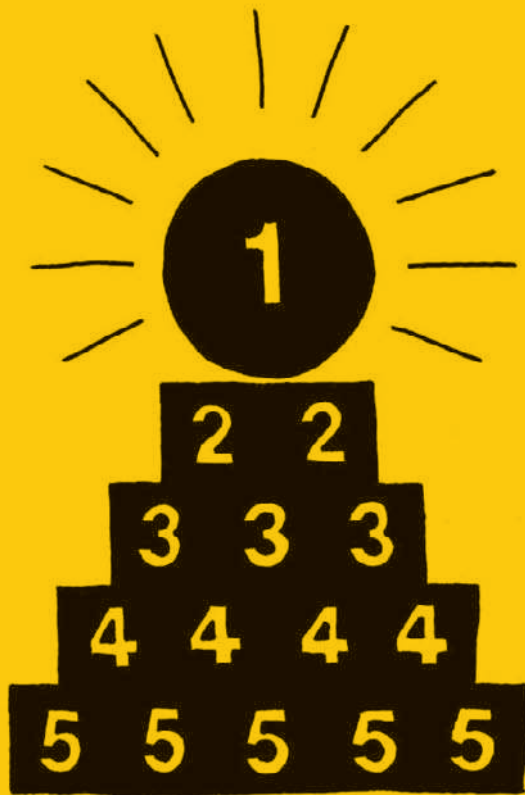
rituals and ceremonies. Legend states that Laozi left the court as the Zhou dynasty declined, and journeyed west in search of solitude. As he was about to cross the border, one of the guards recognized him and asked for a record of his wisdom. Laozi wrote the *Daode jing* for him, and then continued on his way, never to be seen again.

Key works

c.6th century BCE
Daode jing (also known
as the *Laozi*)

NUMBER IS THE RULER OF FORMS AND IDEAS

PYTHAGORAS (c.570–495 BCE)



IN CONTEXT

BRANCH

Metaphysics

APPROACH

Pythagoreanism

BEFORE

6th century BCE Thales proposes a non-religious explanation of the cosmos.

AFTER

c.535–c.475 BCE Heraclitus dismisses Pythagoreanism and says that the cosmos is governed by change.

c.428 BCE Plato introduces his concept of perfect Forms, which are revealed to the intellect and not the senses.

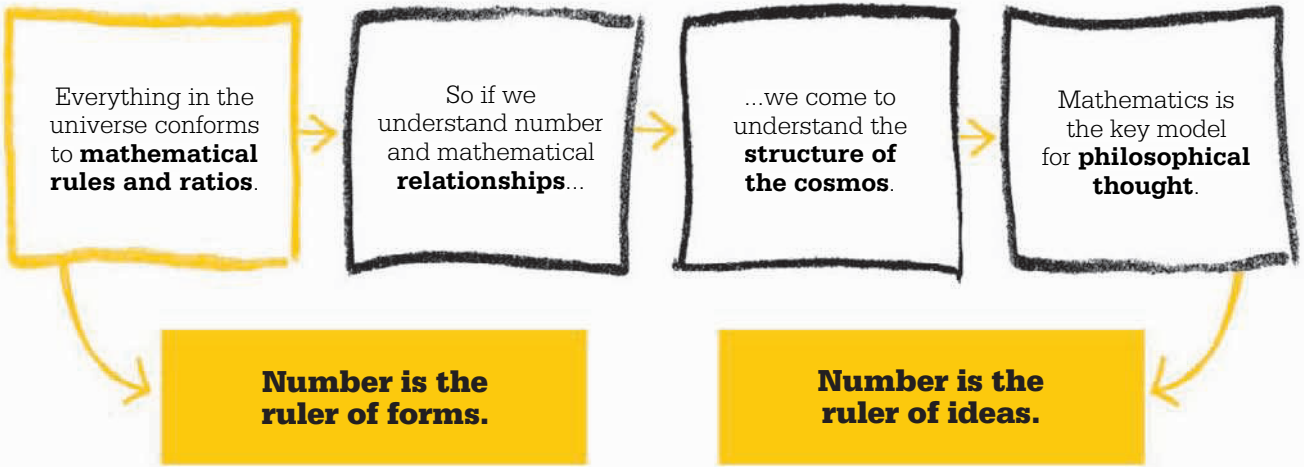
c.300 BCE Euclid, a Greek mathematician, establishes the principles of geometry.

1619 German mathematician Johannes Kepler describes the relationship between geometry and physical phenomena.

Western philosophy was in its infancy when Pythagoras was born.

In Miletus, Greece, a group of philosophers known collectively as the Milesian School had started to seek rational explanations for natural phenomena only a generation or so earlier, marking the beginning of the Western philosophical tradition. Pythagoras spent his childhood not far from Miletus, so it is very likely that he knew of them, and may even have studied in their academy. Like Thales, the founder of the Milesian School, Pythagoras is said to have learnt the rudiments of geometry during a trip to Egypt. With this background, it is not

See also: Thales of Miletus 22–23 ■ Siddhartha Gautama 30–33 ■ Heraclitus 40 ■ Plato 50–55 ■ René Descartes 116–23



surprising that he should approach philosophical thinking in a scientific and mathematical way.

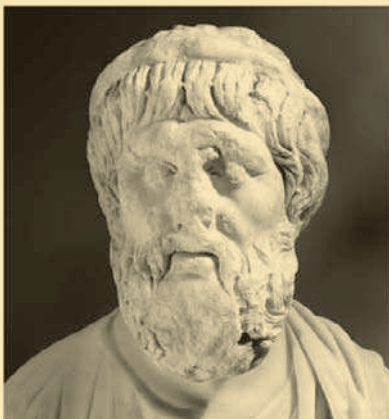
The Pythagorean academy

Pythagoras was also, however, a deeply religious and superstitious man. He believed in reincarnation and the transmigration of souls, and he established a religious cult, with himself cast as a virtual messiah, in Croton, southern Italy. His disciples lived in a collective commune,

following strict behavioral and dietary rules, while studying his religious and philosophical theories. The Pythagoreans, as his disciples were known, saw his ideas as mystical revelations, to the extent that some of the discoveries attributed to him as “revelations” may in fact have come from others in the community. His ideas were recorded by his students, who included his wife, Theano of Crotona, and daughters. The two sides of

Pythagoras’s beliefs—the mystical and the scientific—seem to be irreconcilable, but Pythagoras himself does not see them as contradictory. For him, the goal of life is freedom from the cycle of reincarnation, which can be gained by adhering to a strict set of behavioral rules, and by contemplation, or what we would call objective scientific thinking. In geometry and mathematics he found truths that he regarded »

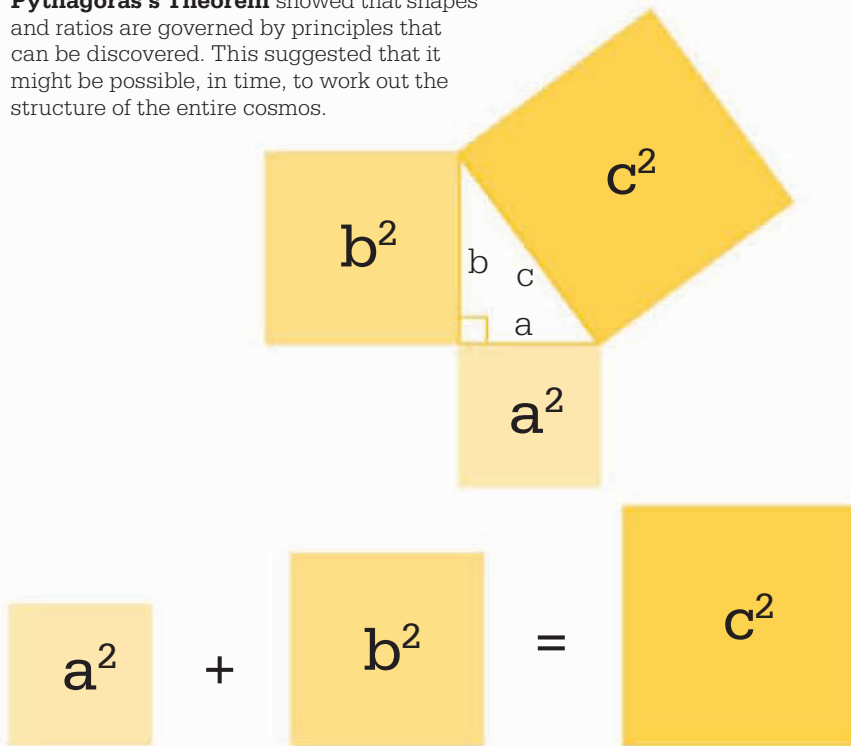
Pythagoras



Little is known about Pythagoras’s life. He left no writings himself, and unfortunately, as the Greek philosopher Porphyry noted in his *Vita Pythagorae*, “No one knows for certain what Pythagoras told his associates, since they observed an unusual silence.” However, modern scholars believe that Pythagoras was probably born on the island of Samos, off the coast of modern-day Turkey. As a young man, he travelled widely, perhaps studying at the Milesian School, and probably visiting Egypt, which was a centre of learning. At the age of about 40, he set up a

community of around 300 people in Croton, southern Italy. Its members studied a mixture of mystical and academic studies, and despite its collective nature, Pythagoras was clearly the community’s leader. At the age of 60, he is said to have married a young girl, Theano of Crotona. Growing hostility toward the Pythagorean cult eventually forced him to leave Croton, and he fled to Metapontum, also in southern Italy, where he died soon after. His community had virtually disappeared by the end of the 4th century BCE.

Pythagoras's Theorem showed that shapes and ratios are governed by principles that can be discovered. This suggested that it might be possible, in time, to work out the structure of the entire cosmos.



as self-evident, as if god-given, and worked out mathematical proofs that had the impact of divine revelation.

Because these mathematical discoveries were a product of pure reasoning, Pythagoras believes they are more valuable than mere observations. For example, the Egyptians had discovered that a triangle whose sides have ratios of 3:4:5 always has a right angle, and this was useful in practice, such as in architecture. But Pythagoras uncovered the underlying principle behind all right-angled triangles (that the square of the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides) and found it to be universally true. This discovery was so extraordinary, and held such potential, that the Pythagoreans took it to be divine revelation.

Pythagoras concludes that the whole cosmos must be governed by mathematical rules. He says

that number (numerical ratios and mathematical axioms) can be used to explain the very structure of the cosmos. He does not totally dismiss the Milesian idea that the universe is made up of one fundamental substance, but he shifts the enquiry from substance to form.

This was such a profound change in the way of looking at the world, that we should probably forgive Pythagoras and his disciples for getting somewhat carried away, and giving numbers a mystical significance. Through exploring the relationship between numbers and geometry, they discovered the square numbers and cube numbers that we speak of today, but they also attributed characteristics to them, such as “good” to the even numbers and “evil” to the odd ones, and even specifics such as “justice” to the number four, and so on. The number ten, in the form of the tetractys (a

“

There is geometry in the humming of the strings, there is music in the spacing of the spheres.

Pythagoras

”

triangular shape made up of rows of dots) had a particular significance in Pythagorean ritual. Less contentiously, they saw the number one as a single point, a unity, from which other things could be derived. The number two, in this way of thinking, was a line, number three a surface or plane, and four a solid; the correspondence with our modern concept of dimensions is obvious.

The Pythagorean explanation of the creation of the universe followed a mathematical pattern: on the Unlimited (the infinite that existed before the universe), God imposed a Limit, so that all that exists came to have an actual size. In this way God created a *measurable* unity from which everything else was formed.

Numerical harmonies

Pythagoras's most important discovery was the relationships between numbers: the ratios and proportions. This was reinforced by his investigations into music, and in particular into the relationships between notes that sounded pleasant together. The story goes that he first stumbled onto this idea when listening to blacksmiths at work. One had an anvil half the size of the other, and the sounds they made when

hit with a hammer were exactly an octave (eight notes) apart. While this may be true, it was probably by experimenting with a plucked string that Pythagoras determined the ratios of the consonant intervals (the number of notes between two notes that determines whether they will sound harmonious if struck together). What he discovered was that these intervals were harmonious because the relationship between them was a precise and simple mathematical ratio. This series, which we now know as the harmonic series, confirmed for him that the elegance of the mathematics he had found in abstract geometry also existed in the natural world.

The stars and elements

Pythagoras had now proved not only that the structure of the universe can be explained in mathematical terms—"number is the ruler of forms"—but also that acoustics is an exact science, and number governs harmonious proportions. He then started to apply his theories to the whole cosmos, demonstrating the harmonic relationship of the stars, planets, and elements. His idea of harmonic relationships between the stars was eagerly taken up by medieval and Renaissance astronomers, who developed whole theories around the idea of the music of the spheres, and his suggestion that the elements were arranged harmoniously was revisited over 2,000 years after his death. In 1865 English chemist John Newlands discovered that when the chemical elements are arranged according to

atomic weight, those with similar properties occur at every eighth element, like notes of music. This discovery became known as the Law of Octaves, and it helped lead to the development of the Periodic Law of chemical elements still used today.

Pythagoras also established the principle of deductive reasoning, which is the step-by-step process of starting with self-evident axioms (such as " $2 + 2 = 4$ ") to build toward a new conclusion or fact. Deductive reasoning was later refined by Euclid, and it formed the basis of mathematical thinking into medieval times and beyond.

One of Pythagoras's most important contributions to the development of philosophy was the idea that abstract thinking is superior to the evidence of the senses. This was taken up by Plato in his theory of Forms, and resurfaced in the philosophical method of the rationalists in the 17th century. The Pythagorean attempt to combine the rational with the religious was the first

“

Reason is immortal,
all else mortal.

Pythagoras

”

attempt to grapple with a problem that has dogged philosophy and religion in some ways ever since.

Almost everything we know about Pythagoras comes to us from others; even the bare facts of his life are largely conjecture. Yet he has achieved a near-legendary status (which he apparently encouraged) for the ideas attributed to him. Whether or not he was in fact the originator of these ideas does not really matter; what is important is their profound effect on philosophical thought. ■

Classical architecture follows Pythagorean mathematical ratios. Harmonious shapes and ratios are used throughout, scaled down in the smaller parts, and up for the overall structure.



HAPPY IS HE WHO HAS OVERCOME HIS EGO

SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA (c.563–483 BCE)



IN CONTEXT

TRADITION

Eastern philosophy

APPROACH

Buddhism

BEFORE

c.1500 BCE Vedism reaches the Indian subcontinent.

c.10th–5th centuries BCE

Brahmanism replaces Vedic beliefs.

AFTER

3rd century BCE Buddhism spreads from the Ganges valley westward across India.

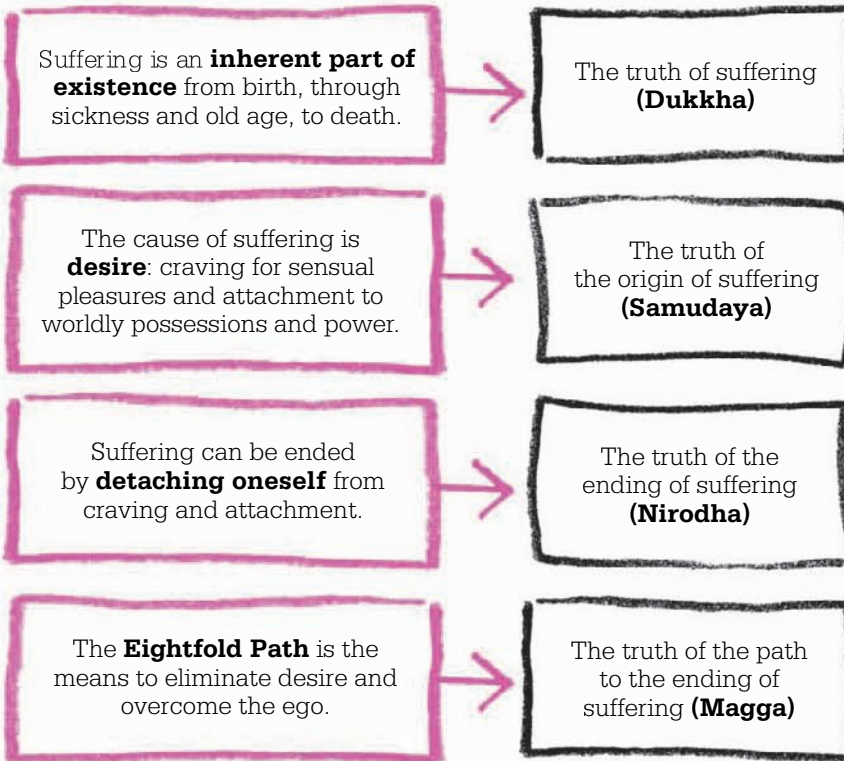
1st century BCE The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama are written down for the first time.

1st century CE Buddhism starts to spread to China and Southeast Asia. Different schools of Buddhism begin to evolve in different areas.

Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha, “the enlightened one”, lived in India during a period when religious and mythological accounts of the world were being questioned. In Greece, thinkers such as Pythagoras were examining the cosmos using reason, and in China, Laozi and Confucius were detaching ethics from religious dogma. Brahmanism, a religion that had evolved from Vedism—an ancient belief based on the sacred Veda texts—was the dominant faith in the Indian subcontinent in the 6th century BCE, and Siddhartha Gautama was the first to challenge its teachings with philosophical reasoning.

See also: Laozi 24–25 ■ Pythagoras 26–29 ■ Confucius 34–39 ■
David Hume 148–53 ■ Arthur Schopenhauer 186–188 ■ Hajime Tanabe 244–45

The Four Noble Truths



Gautama, although revered by Buddhists for his wisdom, was neither a messiah nor a prophet, and he did not act as a medium between God and Man. His ideas were arrived at through reasoning, not divine revelation, and it is this that marks Buddhism out as a philosophy as much as (perhaps even more than) a religion. His quest was philosophical—to discover truths—and he maintained that these truths are available to all of us through the power of reason. Like most Eastern philosophers, he was not interested in the unanswerable questions of metaphysics that preoccupied the Greeks. Dealing with entities

beyond our experience, this kind of enquiry was senseless speculation. Instead, he concerned himself with the question of the goal of life, which in turn involved examining the concepts of happiness, virtue, and the “good” life.

The middle way

In his early life, Gautama enjoyed luxury and, we are told, all the sensual pleasures. However, he realized that these were not enough on their own to bring him true happiness. He was acutely aware of the suffering in the world, and saw that it was largely due to sickness, old age, and death, and the fact that people lack what »



Siddhartha Gautama

Almost all we know of Siddhartha Gautama's life comes from biographies written by his followers centuries after his death, and which differ widely in many details. What is certain is that he was born in Lumbini, modern-day Nepal, some time around 560 BCE. His father was an official, possibly the leader of a clan, and Siddhartha led a privileged life of luxury and high status.

Dissatisfied with this, Siddhartha left his wife and son to find a spiritual path, and discovered the “middle way” between sensual indulgence and asceticism. He experienced enlightenment while thinking in the shade of a bodhi tree, and devoted the rest of his life to traveling throughout India, preaching. After his death, his teachings were passed down orally for some 400 years before being written down in the *Tipitaka* (*Three Baskets*).

Key works

1st century CE
Tipitaka (recounted by his followers), comprising:
Vinaya-pitaka, *Sutta-pitaka*,
Abhidhamma-pitaka



The Buddha cut off his hair as part of his renunciation of the material world. According to Buddhist teaching, the temptations of the world are the source of all suffering, and must be resisted.

they need. He also recognized that the sensual pleasure we indulge in to relieve suffering is rarely satisfying, and that when it is, the effects are transitory. He found the experience of extreme asceticism (austerity and abstinence) equally dissatisfying, bringing him no nearer to an understanding of how to achieve happiness.

Gautama came to the conclusion that there must be a “middle way” between self-indulgence and self-mortification. This middle way, he believed, should lead to true happiness, or “enlightenment”, and to find it he applied reason to his own experiences.

Suffering, he realized, is universal. It is an integral part of existence, and the root cause of our suffering is the frustration of our desires and expectations. These desires he calls “attachments”, and they include not only our sensual desires and worldly ambitions, but our most basic instinct for self-preservation. Satisfying these attachments, he argues,

may bring short-term gratification, but not happiness in the sense of contentment and peace of mind.

The “not-self”

The next step in Gautama’s reasoning is that the elimination of attachments will prevent any disappointment, and so avoid suffering. To achieve this, he suggests a root cause of our attachments—our selfishness, and by selfishness he means more than just our tendency to seek gratification. For Gautama, selfishness is self-centeredness and self-attachment—the domain of what today we would call the “ego.” So, to free ourselves from attachments that cause us pain, it is not enough merely to renounce the things we desire—we must overcome our attachment to that which desires—the “self.”

But how can this be done? Desire, ambition, and expectation are part of our nature, and for most of us constitute our very reasons for living. The answer, for Gautama, is that the ego’s world is illusory—as he shows, again, by a process of reasoning. He argues that nothing in the universe is self-caused, for everything is the result of some previous action, and each of us is only a transitory part of this eternal process—ultimately impermanent and without substance. So, in reality, there is no “self” that is not part of the greater whole—or the “not-self”—and suffering results from our failure to recognize this. This does not mean that we should deny our existence or personal identity, rather that we should understand them for what they are—transient and insubstantial. Grasping the concept of being a constituent part of an eternal “not-self”, rather than clinging to the

“

Believe nothing,
no matter where you
read it, or who said it,
unless it agrees with
your own reason.

Siddhartha Gautama

”

notion of being a unique “self”, is the key to losing that attachment, and finding a release from suffering.

The Eightfold Path

Gautama’s reasoning from the causes of suffering to the way to achieve happiness is codified in Buddhist teachings in the Four Noble Truths: that suffering is universal; that desire is the cause of suffering; that suffering can be avoided by eliminating desire; that following the Eightfold Path will eliminate desire. This last Truth refers to what amounts to a practical guide to the “middle way” that Gautama laid out for his followers to achieve enlightenment.

“

Peace comes
from within. Do not
seek it without.

Siddhartha Gautama

”

The Eightfold Path (right action, right intention, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration, right speech, right understanding, and right mindfulness) is in effect a code of ethics—a prescription for a good life and the happiness that Gautama first set out to find.

Nirvana

Gautama sees the ultimate goal of life on Earth to be the ending of the cycle of suffering (birth, death, and rebirth) into which we are born. By following the Eightfold Path, a man can overcome his ego and live a life free from suffering, and through his enlightenment he can avoid the pain of rebirth into another life of suffering. He has realized his place in the “not-self”, and become at one with the eternal. He has attained the state of Nirvana—which is variously translated as “non-attachment”, “not-being”, or literally “blowing out” (as of a candle).

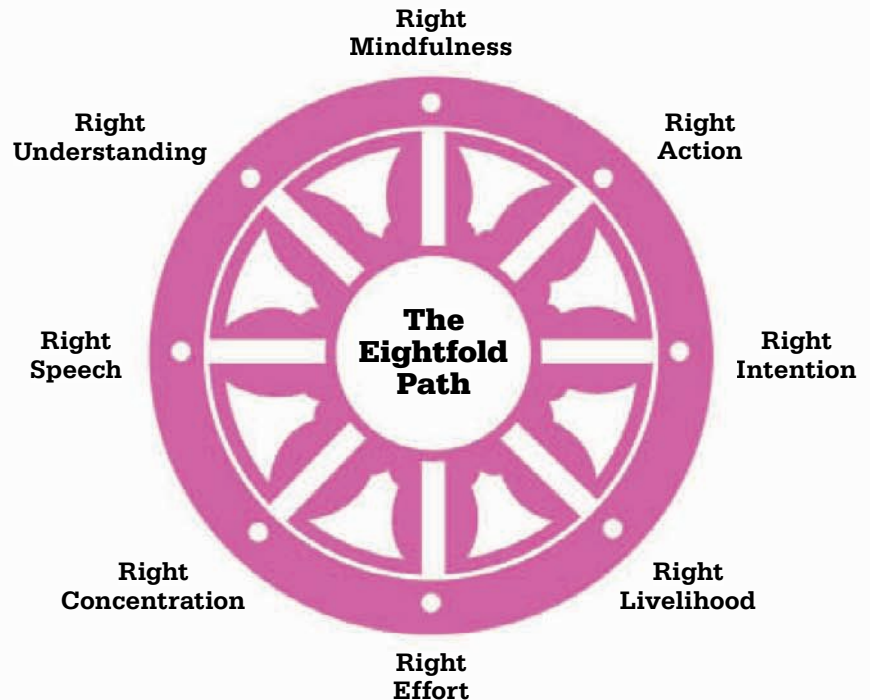
In the Brahmanism of Gautama's time, and the Hindu religion that followed, Nirvana was seen as becoming one with god, but Gautama carefully avoids any mention of a deity or of an ultimate purpose to life. He merely describes Nirvana as “unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, and unformed”, and transcending any sensory

experience. It is an eternal and unchanging state of not-being, and so the ultimate freedom from the suffering of existence.

Gautama spent many years after his enlightenment traveling around India, preaching and teaching. During his lifetime, he gained a considerable following, and Buddhism became established as a major religion as well as a philosophy. His teachings were passed down orally from generation to generation by his followers, until the 1st century CE, when they were written down for the first time. Various schools began to appear as Buddhism spread across India, and later spread eastward into China and Southeast Asia, where it rivalled Confucianism and Daoism in its popularity.

Gautama's teachings spread as far as the Greek empire by the 3rd century BCE, but had little influence on Western philosophy. However, there were similarities between Gautama's approach to philosophy and that of the Greeks, not least Gautama's emphasis on reasoning as a means of finding happiness, and his disciples' use of philosophical dialogues to elucidate his teachings. His thoughts also find echoes in the ideas of later Western philosophers, such as in Hume's concept of the self and Schopenhauer's view of the human condition. But it was not until the 20th century that Buddhism was to have any direct influence on Western thinking. Since then, more and more Westerners have turned to it for guidance on how to live. ■

The dharma wheel, one of the oldest Buddhist symbols, represents the Eightfold Path to Nirvana. In Buddhism, the word “dharma” refers to the teachings of the Buddha.



“

The mind is everything. What you think, you become.

Siddhartha Gautama

”



HOLD FAITHFULNESS AND SINCERITY AS FIRST PRINCIPLES

CONFUCIUS (551–479 BCE)





IN CONTEXT

TRADITION

Chinese philosophy

APPROACH

Confucianism

BEFORE

7th century BCE The Hundred Schools of Thought emerge.

6th century BCE Laozi

proposes acting in accordance with the *dao* (the Way).

AFTER

c.470–c.380 BCE Chinese philosopher Mozi argues against Confucian ideas.

372–289 BCE Chinese thinker Meng Zi revives Confucianism.

221–202 BCE Confucianism is suppressed by the Qin Dynasty.

136 BCE The Han Dynasty introduces civil service examinations modelled on Confucian texts.

9th century CE Confucianism is reborn as Neo-Confucianism.

From 770 to 220 BCE, China enjoyed an era of great cultural development, and the philosophies that emerged at this time were known as the Hundred Schools of Thought. By the 6th century BCE, the Zhou Dynasty was in decline—moving from the stability of the Spring and Autumn Period to the aptly named Warring States Period—and it was during this time that Kong Fuzi, the Master Kong, or Confucius, was born. Like other philosophers of the age—such as Thales, Pythagoras, and Heraclitus of Greece—Confucius sought constants in a world of change, and for him this meant a search for moral values that could enable rulers to govern justly.

The Analects

Unlike many of the early Chinese philosophers, Confucius looked to the past for his inspiration. He was conservative by nature, and had a great respect for ritual and ancestor worship—both of which were maintained by the Zhou Dynasty, whose rulers received authority from the gods via the so-called Heavenly Mandate.

“

The superior man does what is proper to the station in which he is; he does not desire to go beyond this.

Confucius

”

A rigid social hierarchy existed in China, but Confucius was part of a new class of scholars who acted as advisors to the courts—in effect a class of civil servants—and they achieved their status not through inheritance, but by merit. It was Confucius's integration of the old ideals with the emerging meritocracy that produced his unique new moral philosophy.

The main source we have for the teachings of Confucius is the *Analects*, a collection of fragments of his writings and sayings compiled by his disciples. It is primarily a political treatise, made up of

Confucius



According to tradition, Confucius was born in 551 BCE in Qufu, in the state of Lu, China. His name was originally Kong Qiu, and only later did he earn the title Kong Fuzi, or “Master Kong.” Little is known about his life, except that he was from a well-to-do family, and that as a young man he worked as a servant to support his family after his father died. He nevertheless managed to find time to study, and became an administrator in the Zhou court, but when his suggestions to the rulers were ignored he left to concentrate on teaching.

As a teacher he traveled throughout the empire, and at the end of his life he returned to Qufu, where he died in 479 BCE. His teaching survives in fragments and sayings passed down orally to his disciples, and collected in the *Analects* and anthologies compiled by Confucian scholars.

Key works

5th century BCE
Analects
Doctrine of the Mean
Great Learning

See also: Thales of Miletus 22–23 ■ Laozi 24–25 ■ Pythagoras 26–29 ■ Siddhartha Gautama 30–33 ■ Heraclitus 40 ■ Hajime Tanabe 244–45

aphorisms and anecdotes that form a sort of rule book for good government—but his use of the word *junzi* (literally “gentleman”) to denote a superior, virtuous man, indicates that his concerns were as much social as political. Indeed, many passages of the *Analects* read like a book of etiquette. But to see the *Analects* as merely a social or political treatise is to miss its central point. At its heart lies a comprehensive ethical system.

The virtuous life

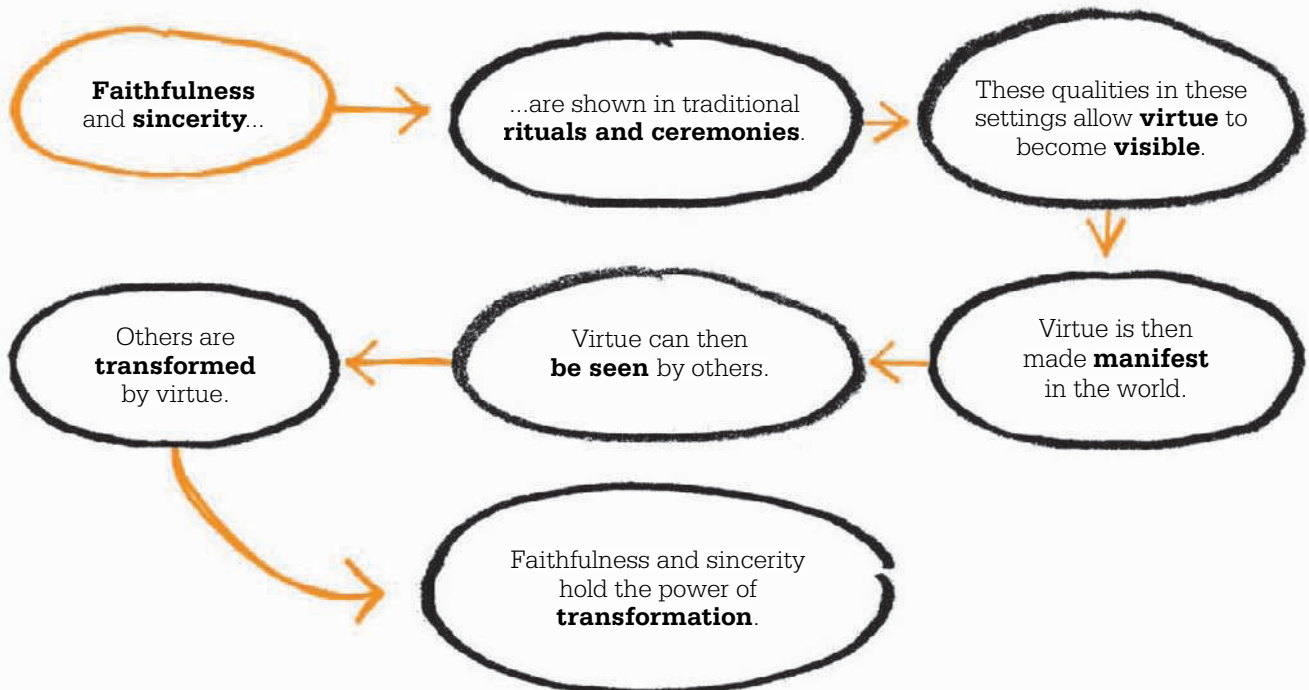
Before the appearance of the Hundred Schools of Thought, the world had been explained by mythology and religion, and power and moral authority were generally accepted to be god-given. Confucius is pointedly silent about the gods, but he often refers to *tian*, or

Heaven, as the source of moral order. According to the *Analects*, we humans are the agents that Heaven has chosen to embody its will and to unite the world with the moral order—an idea that was in line with traditional Chinese thinking. What breaks with tradition, however, is Confucius's belief that *de*—virtue—is not something Heaven-sent for the ruling classes, but something that can be cultivated—and cultivated by anyone. Having himself risen to be a minister of the Zhou court, he believed that it was a duty of the middle classes, as well as the rulers, to strive to act with virtue and benevolence (*ren*) to achieve a just and stable society.

To reconcile the fact that society was a rigid class system with his belief that all men can receive the

blessing of the Heavenly Mandate, Confucius argues that the virtuous man is not simply one who stands at the top of the social hierarchy, but one who understands his place within that hierarchy and embraces it to the full. And to define the various means of acting in accordance with *de*—virtue—he turns to traditional Chinese values: *zhong*, loyalty; *xiao*, filial piety; *li*, ritual propriety; and *shu*, reciprocity. The person who sincerely observes these values Confucius called *junzi*, the gentleman or superior man, by which he means a man of virtue, learning, and good manners.

The values of *de* had evolved within the ruling classes but had become little more than empty gestures in the disintegrating world of the Zhou Dynasty. Confucius is attempting to »



The Five Constant Relationships



Sovereign—Subject

Rulers should be benevolent, and subjects loyal.



Father—Son

A parent is to be loving, a child obedient.



Husband—Wife

Husbands are to be good and fair, and wives understanding.



Elder Brother— Younger Brother

An elder sibling is to be gentle, and younger siblings respectful.



Friend—Friend

Older friends are to be considerate, younger friends reverential.

persuade the rulers to return to these ideals and to restore a just government, but he also believes in the power of benevolence—arguing that ruling by example rather than by fear would inspire the people to follow a similarly virtuous life. The same principle, he believes, should govern personal relationships.

Loyalty and ritual

In his analysis of relationships, Confucius uses *zhong*—the virtue of loyalty—as a guiding principle. To begin with, he stresses the importance of the loyalty of a minister to his sovereign, then shows that a similar relation holds between father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and between friends. The order in which he arranges these is significant—political loyalty first, then family and clan loyalties, then loyalties to friends and strangers. For Confucius, this hierarchy reflects the fact that each person should know his station in society as a whole, as well his place in the family and the clan.

This aspect of “knowing one’s station” is exemplified by *xiao*—filial piety—which for Confucius was much more than just respect for one’s parents or elders. In fact, this is the closest he gets to religious ideas in the *Analects*, for *xiao* is connected to the traditional practice of ancestor worship. Above all, *xiao* reinforced the relationship of inferior to superior, which was central to his thinking.

It is in his insistence on *li*—ritual propriety—that Confucius is at his most conservative. *Li* did not simply refer to rituals such as ancestor worship, but also to the social norms that underpinned every aspect of contemporary Chinese life. These ranged from ceremonies such as marriages,



Ritual and tradition, for Confucius, are vital for binding an individual to his community. By knowing his place in society, the individual is free to become *junzi*, a man of virtue.

funerals, and sacrifices to the etiquette of receiving guests, presenting gifts, and the simple, everyday gestures of politeness, such as bowing and using the correct mode of address. These are, according to Confucius, the outward signs of an inner *de*—but only when they are performed with sincerity, which he considers to be the way of Heaven. Through the outward show of loyalty with inner sincerity, the superior man can transform society.

Sincerity

For Confucius, society can be changed by example. As he writes: “Sincerity becomes apparent. From being apparent, it becomes manifest. From being manifest, it becomes brilliant. Brilliant, it affects others. Affecting others, they are changed by it. Changed by it, they are transformed. Only he who is possessed of the most complete sincerity that can exist under Heaven, can transform.”

Here, Confucius is at his least conservative, and he explains that the process of transformation can work both ways. The concept of *zhong* (faithfulness) also has an

“

What you know,
you know;
what you don't know,
you don't know.
This is true wisdom.

Confucius

”

implication of “regard for others.” He took the view that one can learn to become a superior man by first recognizing what one does not know (an idea echoed a century later by the Greek philosopher Socrates, who claimed that his wisdom lay in accepting that he knew nothing), and then by watching other people: if they show virtue, try to become their equal; if they are inferior, be their guide.

Self-reflection

This notion of *zhong* as a regard for others is also tied to the last of the Confucian values of *de*: *shu*, reciprocity, or “self-reflection”, which should govern our actions toward others. The so-called Golden Rule, “do as you would be done by”, appears in Confucianism as a negative: “what you do not desire for yourself, do not do to others.” The difference is subtle but crucial: Confucius does not prescribe what to do, only what not to do, emphasizing restraint rather than

action. This implies modesty and humility—values traditionally held in high regard in Chinese society, and which for Confucius express our true nature. Fostering these values is a form of loyalty to oneself, and another kind of sincerity.

Confucianism

Confucius had little success in persuading contemporary rulers to adopt his ideas in government, and turned his attention to teaching. His disciples, including Meng Zi (Mencius), continued to anthologize and expand on his writings, which survived the repressive Qin Dynasty, and inspired a revival of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty of the early Common Era. From then on, the impact of Confucius's ideas was profound, inspiring almost every aspect of Chinese society, from administration to politics and philosophy. The major religions of Daoism and Buddhism had also been flourishing in Confucius's time, replacing traditional beliefs, and although Confucius offered no opinion on

them, remaining silent about the gods, he nevertheless influenced aspects of both new faiths.

A Neo-Confucian school revitalized the movement in the 9th century, and reached its peak in the 12th century, when its influence was felt across Southeast Asia into Korea and Japan. Although Jesuit missionaries brought back Kong Fuzi's ideas to Europe (and Latinized his name to Confucius) in the 16th century, Confucianism was alien to European thought and had limited influence until translations of his work appeared in the late 17th century.

Despite the fall of imperial China in 1911, Confucian ideas continued to form the basis of many Chinese moral and social conventions, even if they were officially frowned upon. In recent years the People's Republic of China has shown a renewed interest in Confucius, integrating his ideas with both modern Chinese thought and Western philosophy, creating a hybrid philosophy known as “New Confucianism.” ■



Confucius's devotion to the idea of establishing a humane society led him to travel the Chinese empire for 12 years, teaching the virtues of faithfulness and sincerity.



EVERYTHING IS FLUX

HERACLITUS (c.535–475 BCE)

IN CONTEXT

BRANCH

Metaphysics

APPROACH

Monism

BEFORE

6th century BCE The Milesian philosophers claim that the cosmos is made up of a single specific substance.

6th century BCE Pythagoras states that the universe has an underlying structure that can be defined mathematically.

AFTER

Early 5th century BCE

Parmenides uses logical deduction to prove change is impossible.

Late 4th century BCE Plato describes the world as being in a state of flux, but dismisses Heraclitus as contradictory.

Early 19th century Georg Hegel bases his dialectic system of philosophy on the integration of opposites.

Where other early Greek philosophers seek to uncover scientific explanations for the physical nature of the cosmos, Heraclitus sees it as being governed by a divine logos. Sometimes interpreted to mean “reason” or “argument”, Heraclitus considers the logos to be a universal, cosmic law, according to which all things come into being, and by which all the material elements of the universe are held in balance.

It is the balancing of opposites, such as day and night and hot and cold, which Heraclitus believes

leads to the unity of the universe, or the idea everything is part of a single fundamental process or substance—the central tenet of monism. But he also states that tension is constantly generated between these pairs of opposites, and he therefore concludes that everything must be in a permanent state of flux, or change. Day, for instance, changes into night, which in turn changes back again to day.

Heraclitus offers the example of a river to illustrate his theory: “You can never step into the same river twice.” By this, he means that at the very moment you step into a river, fresh waters will immediately replace those into which you initially placed your foot, and yet the river itself is always described as one fixed and unchanging thing.

Heraclitus's belief that every object in the universe is in a state of constant flux runs counter to the thinking of the philosophers of the Milesian school, such as Thales and Anaximenes, who define all things by their quintessentially unchanging essence. ■

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The road up and
the road down are
one and the same.

Heraclitus
”

See also: Thales of Miletus 22–23 ■ Anaximenes of Miletus 330 ■ Pythagoras 26–29 ■ Parmenides 41 ■ Plato 50–55 ■ Georg Hegel 178–85



ALL IS ONE

PARMENIDES (c.515–445 BCE)

IN CONTEXT

BRANCH
Metaphysics

APPROACH
Monism

BEFORE

6th century BCE Pythagoras sees mathematical structure, rather than a substance, as the foundation of the cosmos.

c.500 BCE Heraclitus says that everything is in a state of flux.

AFTER

Late 5th century BCE Zeno of Elea presents his paradoxes to demonstrate the illusory nature of our experience.

c.400 BCE Democritus and Leucippus say the cosmos is composed of atoms in a void.

Late 4th century BCE Plato presents his theory of Forms, claiming that abstract ideas are the highest form of reality.

1927 Martin Heidegger writes *Being and Time*, reviving the question of the sense of being.

The ideas put forward by Parmenides mark a key turning point in Greek philosophy. Influenced by the logical, scientific thinking of Pythagoras, Parmenides employs deductive reasoning in an attempt to uncover the true physical nature of the world. His investigations lead him to take the opposite view to that of Heraclitus.

From the premise that something exists (“It is”), Parmenides deduces that it cannot also not exist (“It is not”), as this would involve a logical contradiction. It follows therefore that a state of nothing existing is impossible—there can be no void. Something cannot then come from nothing, and so must always have existed in some form. This permanent form cannot change, because something that is permanent cannot change into something else without it ceasing to be permanent. Fundamental change is therefore impossible.

Parmenides concludes from this pattern of thought that everything that is real must be eternal and



Understanding the cosmos is one of the oldest philosophical quests. In the 20th century, evidence from quantum physics emerged to support ideas that Parmenides reached by reason alone.

unchanging, and must have an indivisible unity—“all is one.” More importantly for subsequent philosophers, Parmenides shows by his process of reasoning that our perception of the world is faulty and full of contradictions. We seem to experience change, and yet our reason tells us that change is impossible. The only conclusion we can come to is that we can never rely on the experience that is delivered to us by our senses. ■

See also: Pythagoras 26–29 ■ Heraclitus 40 ■ Democritus and Leucippus 45 ■ Zeno of Elea 331 ■ Plato 50–55 ■ Martin Heidegger 252–255



MAN IS THE MEASURE OF ALL THINGS

PROTAGORAS (c.490–420 BCE)

IN CONTEXT

BRANCH

Ethics

APPROACH

Relativism

BEFORE

Early 5th century BCE

Parmenides argues that we can rely more on reason than the evidence of our senses.

AFTER

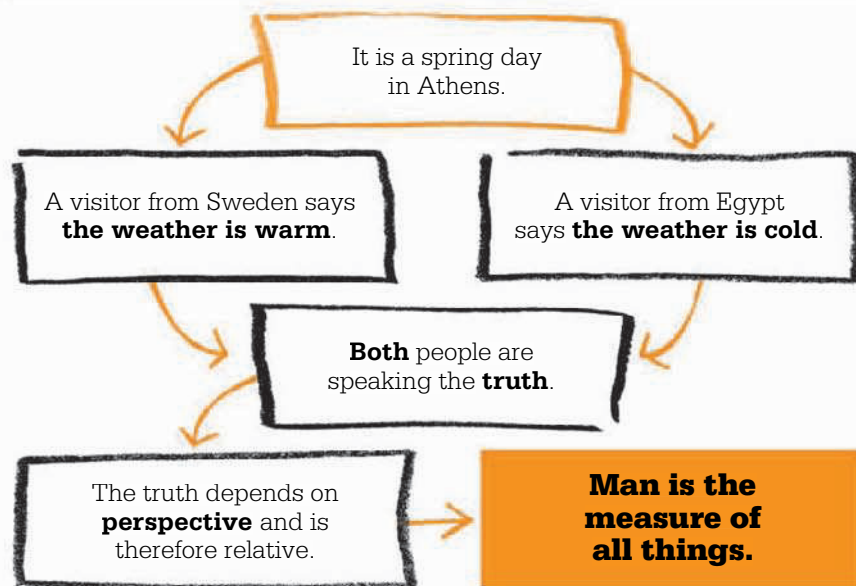
Early 4th century BCE

Plato's theory of Forms states that there are "absolutes" or ideal forms of everything.

1580 French writer Michel de Montaigne espouses a form of relativism to describe human behavior in his *Essays*.

1967–72 Jacques Derrida uses his technique of deconstruction to show that any text contains irreconcilable contradictions.

2005 Benedict XVI warns "we are moving towards a dictatorship of relativism" in his first public address as pope.



During the 5th century BCE, Athens evolved into an important and prosperous city-state, and under the leadership of Pericles (445–429 BCE) it entered a “Golden Age” of scholarship and culture. This attracted people from all parts of Greece, and for those who knew and could interpret the law, there were rich pickings to be had. The city was run on broadly democratic principles, with an established legal system. Anyone

taken to court was required to plead his own case; there were no advocates, but a recognized class of advisors soon evolved. Among this group was Protagoras.

Everything is relative

Protagoras lectured in law and rhetoric to anybody who could afford him. His teachings were essentially about practical matters, arguing to win a civil case rather than to prove a point, but he could

See also: Parmenides 41 ■ Socrates 46–49 ■ Plato 50–55 ■ Michel de Montaigne 108–09 ■ Jacques Derrida 308–13

“

Many things prevent knowledge, including the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life.

Protagoras

”

see the philosophical implications of what he taught. For Protagoras, every argument has two sides, and both may be equally valid. He claims that he can “make the worse case the better”, proving not the worth of the argument, but the persuasiveness of its proponent. In this way, he recognizes that belief is subjective, and it is the man holding the view or opinion that is the measure of its worth. This style of reasoning, common in law and

politics at that time, was new to philosophy. By placing human beings at its center, it continued a tradition of taking religion out of philosophical argument, and it also shifted the focus of philosophy away from an understanding of the nature of the universe to an examination of human behavior. Protagoras is mainly interested in practical questions. Philosophical speculations on the substance of the cosmos or about the existence of the gods seem pointless to him, as he considers such things to be ultimately unknowable.

The main implication of “man is the measure of all things” is that belief is subjective and relative. This leads Protagoras to reject the existence of absolute definitions of truth, justice, or virtue. What is true for one person may be false for another, he claims. This relativism also applies to moral values, such as what is right and what is wrong. To Protagoras, nothing is inherently good in itself. Something is ethical, or right, only because a person or society judges it to be so.

Protagoras was the most influential of a group of itinerant teachers of law and rhetoric that became known as the Sophists (from the Greek *sophia*, meaning wisdom). Socrates and Plato derided the Sophists as mere rhetoricians, but with Protagoras there was a significant step in ethics toward the view that there are no absolutes and that all judgements, including moral judgements, are subjective. ■



According to Protagoras, any “truth” uncovered by these two philosophers, depicted on a 5th-century BCE Greek drinking vessel, will depend on their use of rhetoric and their debating skill.

Protagoras



Protagoras was born in Abdera, in northeast Greece, but traveled widely as an itinerant teacher. At some stage, he moved to Athens, where he became advisor to the ruler of the city-state, Pericles, who commissioned him to write the constitution for the colony of Thurii in 444 BCE. Protagoras was a proponent of agnosticism, and legend has it that he was later tried for impiety, and that his books were publicly burned.

Only fragments of his writings survive, although Plato discusses the views of Protagoras at length in his dialogues.

Protagoras is believed to have lived to the age of 70, but his exact date and place of death are unknown.

Key works

5th century BCE

On the Gods

Truth

On Being

The Art of Controversy

On Mathematics

On the State

On Ambition

On Virtues

On the Original State of Things



WHEN ONE THROWS TO ME A PEACH, I RETURN TO HIM A PLUM

MOZI (c.470–391 BCE)

IN CONTEXT

TRADITION
Chinese philosophy

APPROACH
Mohism

BEFORE
6th century BCE Laozi states that to live according to the *dao* means acting intuitively and in accordance with nature.

Late 6th century BCE
Confucius's moral philosophy stresses the importance of family ties and traditions.

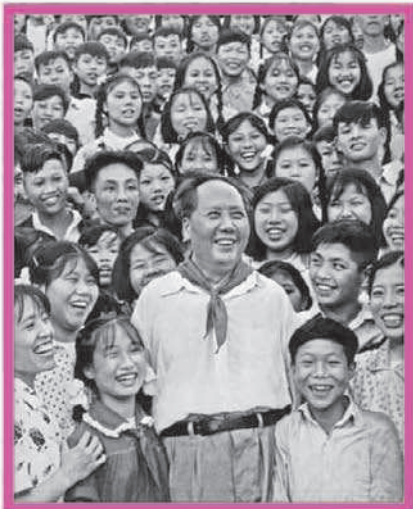
AFTER
Mid-4th century BCE
The Confucian philosophy of Mencius stresses man's innate goodness.

Mid-4th century BCE Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi criticizes Confucianism and Mohism.

3rd century BCE Legalism is adopted by the Qin dynasty. It opposes Mohism, advocating strong laws to keep man's essentially evil nature in check.

Born in 479 BCE, shortly after the death of Confucius, Mozi had a traditional Chinese education based on the classic texts. Later, however, he came to dislike the emphasis on clan relationships that runs through Confucianism, and this led him to set up his own school of thought, advocating universal love or *jian ai*. By *jian ai*, Mozi means that we should care for all people equally, regardless of their status or their relationship to us. He regards this philosophy, which became known as Mohism and which “nourishes and sustains all life”, as being fundamentally benevolent and in accordance with the way of heaven.

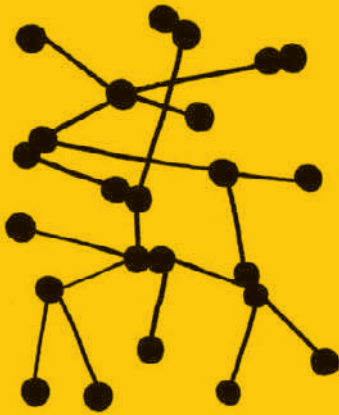
Mozi believes that there is always reciprocity in our actions. By treating others as we would wish to be treated ourselves, we will receive similar treatment in return. This is the meaning behind “when one throws to me a peach, I return to him a plum.” When this principle of caring for everyone impartially is applied by rulers, Mozi states that it avoids conflict



Mao Zedong regarded Mozi as the true philosopher of the people, because of his humble origins. Mozi's view that everyone should be treated equally has been encouraged in modern China.

and war; when the same principle is practiced by everyone, it leads to a more harmonious and therefore more productive society. This idea is similar in spirit to that of the Utilitarianism proposed by Western philosophers of the 19th century. ■

See also: Laozi 24–25 ■ Siddhartha Gautama 30–33 ■ Confucius 34–39 ■ Wang Bi 331 ■ Jeremy Bentham 174 ■ Hajime Tanabe 244–45



NOTHING EXISTS EXCEPT ATOMS AND EMPTY SPACE

DEMOCRITUS (c. 460–371 BCE)
AND LEUCIPPUS (EARLY 5TH CENTURY BCE)

IN CONTEXT

BRANCH
Metaphysics

APPROACH
Atomism

BEFORE

Early 6th century BCE Thales says that the cosmos is made of one fundamental substance.

c.500 BCE Heraclitus declares that everything is in a state of constant flux, or change.

AFTER

c.300 BCE The Epicurians conclude that there is no afterlife, as the body's atoms disperse after death.

1805 British chemist John Dalton proposes that all pure substances contain atoms of a single type that combine to form compounds.

1897 The British physicist J.J. Thomson discovers that atoms can be divided into even smaller particles.

From the 6th century BCE onward, philosophers began to consider whether the universe was made from a single fundamental substance. During the 5th century BCE, two philosophers from Abdera in Greece, named Democritus and Leucippus, suggested that everything was made up of tiny, indivisible, and unchangeable particles, which they called atoms (*atomos* is Greek for uncuttable).

First atomic theory

Democritus and Leucippus also claim that a void or empty space separates atoms, allowing them to move around freely. As the atoms move, they may collide with each other to form new arrangements of atoms, so that objects in the world will appear to change. The two thinkers consider that there are an infinite number of these eternal atoms, but that the number of different combinations they can arrange themselves into is finite. This explains the apparent fixed number of different substances that

exist. The atoms that make up our bodies, for example, do not decay and disappear when we die, but are dispersed and can be reconstituted.

Known as atomism, the theory that Democritus and Leucippus devised offered the first complete mechanistic view of the universe, without any recourse to the notion of a god or gods. It also identified fundamental properties of matter that have proved critical to the development of the physical sciences, particularly from the 17th century onward, right up to the atomic theories that revolutionized science in the 20th century.■

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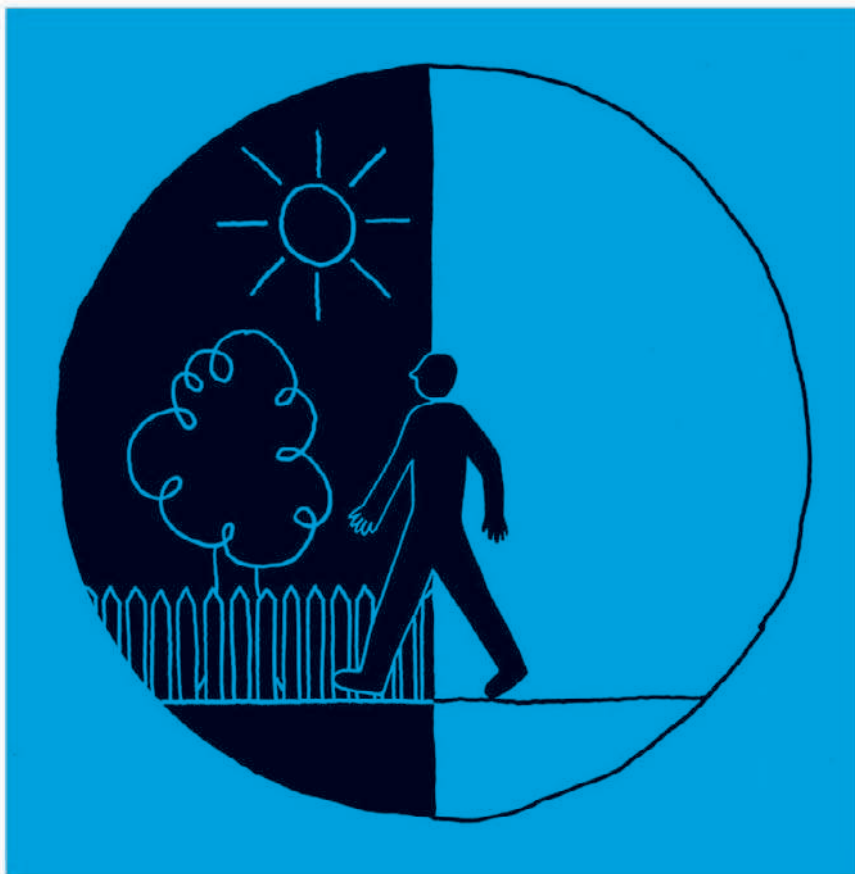
Man is a microcosm
of the universe.
Democritus

”

See also: Thales of Miletus 22–23 ■ Heraclitus 40 ■ Epicurus 64–65

THE LIFE WHICH IS UNEXAMINED IS NOT WORTH LIVING

SOCRATES (469–399 BCE)



IN CONTEXT

BRANCH

Epistemology

APPROACH

Dialectical method

BEFORE

c.600–450 BCE Pre-Socratic philosophers in Ionia and Italy attempt to explain the nature of the cosmos.

Early 5th century BCE

Parmenides states that we can only understand the universe through reasoning.

c.450 BCE Protagoras and the Sophists apply rhetoric to philosophical questions.

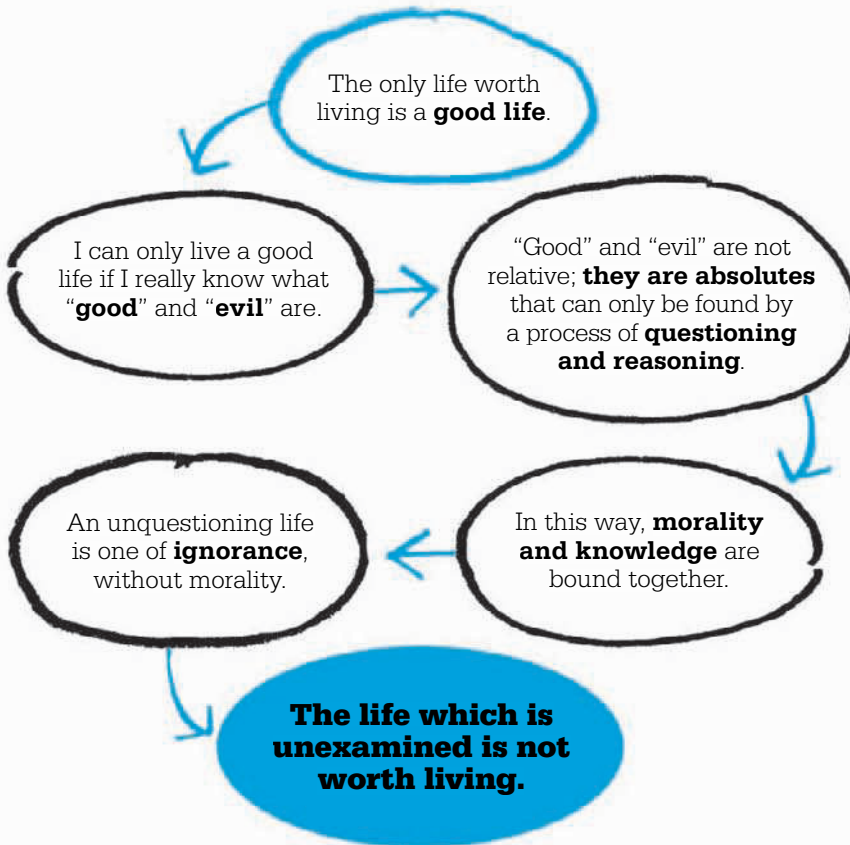
AFTER

c.399–355 BCE Plato portrays the character of Socrates in the *Apology* and numerous other dialogues.

4th century BCE Aristotle acknowledges his debt to Socrates' method.

Socrates is often referred to as one of the founders of Western philosophy, and yet he wrote nothing, established no school, and held no particular theories of his own. What he did do, however, was persistently ask the questions that interested him, and in doing so evolved a new way of thinking, or a new way of examining what we think. This has been called the Socratic, or dialectical, method ("dialectical" because it proceeds as a dialogue between opposing views), and it earned him many enemies in Athens, where he lived. He was vilified as a Sophist (someone who argues for the sake of deception), and was sentenced to

See also: Thales of Miletus 22–23 ■ Pythagoras 26–29 ■ Heraclitus 40 ■ Parmenides 41 ■ Protagoras 42–43 ■ Plato 50–55 ■ Aristotle 56–63

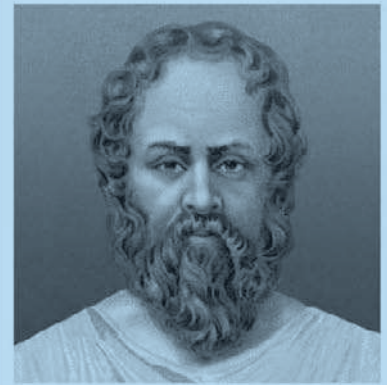


death on charges of corrupting the young with ideas that undermined tradition. But he also had many followers, and among them was Plato, who recorded Socrates' ideas in a series of written works, called dialogues, in which Socrates sets about examining various ideas. It is largely thanks to these dialogues—which include the *Apology*, *Phaedo*, and the *Symposium*—that Socrates' thought survived at all, and that it went on to guide the course of Western philosophy.

The purpose of life

Socrates lived in Athens in the second half of the 5th century BCE. As a young man he is believed to

have studied natural philosophy, looking at the various explanations of the nature of the universe, but then became involved in the politics of the city-state and concerned with more down-to-earth ethical issues, such as the nature of justice. However, he was not interested in winning arguments, or arguing for the sake of making money—a charge that was leveled at many of his contemporaries. Nor was he seeking answers or explanations—he was simply examining the basis of the concepts we apply to ourselves (such as “good”, “bad”, and “just”), for he believed that understanding what we are is the first task of philosophy. »



Socrates

Born in Athens in 469 BCE, Socrates was the son of a stonemason and a midwife. It is likely that he pursued his father's profession, and had the opportunity to study philosophy, before he was called up for military service. After distinguishing himself during the Peloponnesian War, he returned to Athens, and for a while involved himself in politics. However, when his father died he inherited enough money to live with his wife Xanthippe without having to work.

From then on, Socrates became a familiar sight around Athens, involving himself in philosophical discussions with fellow citizens and gaining a following of young students. He was eventually accused of corrupting the minds of young Athenians, and was sentenced to death. Although he was offered the choice of exile, he accepted the guilty verdict and was given a fatal dose of hemlock in 399 BCE.

Key works

4th–3rd century BCE

Plato's record of Socrates' life and philosophy in the *Apology* and numerous dialogues.

“
I am a citizen
of the world.
Socrates
”

Socrates' central concern, then, was the examination of life, and it was his ruthless questioning of people's most cherished beliefs (largely about themselves) that earned him his enemies—but he remained committed to his task until the very end. According to the account of his defence at his trial, recorded by Plato, Socrates chose death rather than face a life of ignorance: “The life which is unexamined is not worth living.”

But what exactly is involved in this examination of life? For Socrates it was a process of questioning the meaning of essential concepts that we use every day but have never really thought about, thereby revealing their real meaning and our own knowledge or ignorance. Socrates was one of the first philosophers to consider what it was that constituted a “good” life; for him it meant achieving peace of mind as a result of doing the right thing, rather than living according to the moral codes of society. And the “right thing” can only be determined through rigorous examination.

Socrates rejected the notion that concepts such as virtue were relative, insisting instead that they were absolutes, applicable not just to citizens of Athens, or Greece, but to all people in the world. He believed that virtue (*areté* in Greek, which at the time implied excellence and fulfilment) was “the most valuable of possessions”, and that no-one actually desires to do evil. Anyone performing evil actions would be acting against their conscience and would therefore feel uncomfortable; and as we all strive for peace of mind it is not something we would do willingly. Evil, he thought, was done because of lack of wisdom and knowledge. From this he concluded that “there is only one good: knowledge; and one evil: ignorance.” Knowledge is inextricably bound to morality—it is the “only one good”—and for this reason we must continually “examine” our lives.

Care of the soul

For Socrates, knowledge may also play a part in life after death. In the *Apology*, Plato's Socrates prefaces his famous quote about the unexamined life by saying: “I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the

Socrates' dialectical method

was a simple method of questioning that brought to light the often false assumptions on which particular claims to knowledge are based.

