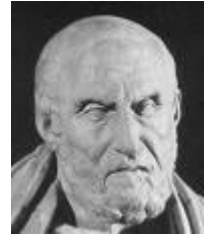




Greek Philosophy



A Brief Description of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle: (trust me, this is the short version!)

Ancient Greek philosophy is dominated by three very famous men: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. All three of these lived in Athens for most of their lives, and they knew each other. Socrates came first, and Plato was his student, around 400 BC. Socrates was killed in 399 BC, and Plato began his work by writing down what Socrates had taught, and then continued by writing down his own ideas and opening a school. Aristotle, who was younger, came to study at Plato's school, and ended up starting his own school as well.

In the years after Plato and Aristotle died, in the 200's BC, three famous kinds of philosophy started up in the schools that Plato and Aristotle had started. These are the Stoics, the Sceptics, and the Epicureans. Each of these continued to be important ways of thinking about the world all the way through the Roman Empire, until people converted to Christianity in the 300's AD, and even after that.

[When] **Socrates** was in his forties or so, he began to feel an urge to think about the world around him, and try to answer some difficult questions. He asked, "What is wisdom?" and "What is beauty?" and "What is the right thing to do?" He knew that these questions were hard to answer, and he thought it would be better to have a lot of people discuss the answers together, so that they might come up with more ideas. So he began to go around Athens asking people he met these questions, "What is wisdom?", "What is piety?", and so forth. Sometimes the people just said they were busy, but sometimes they would try to answer him. Then Socrates would try to teach them to think better by asking them more [questions, which] showed them the problems in their logic. Often this made people angry. Sometimes they even tried to beat him up.

When **Plato** was a young man, he went to listen to Socrates, and learned a lot from Socrates about how to think, and what sort of questions to think about. When Socrates was killed in 399 BC, Plato was very upset (He was 30 years old when Socrates died) . Plato began to write down some of the conversations he had heard Socrates have. Practically everything we know about Socrates comes from what Plato wrote down.

After a while, though, Plato began to write down his own ideas about philosophy instead of just writing down Socrates' ideas. One of his earlier works is the Republic, which describes what Plato thought would be a better form of government than the government of Athens. Plato thought that most people were pretty stupid, and so they should not be voting about what to do. Instead, the best people should be chosen to be the Guardians of the rest. (Remember Plato was from a rich aristocratic family so he probably considered himself among the best people!).

Plato also thought a lot about the natural world and how it works. He thought that everything had a sort of ideal form, like the idea of a chair, and then an actual chair was a sort of poor imitation of the ideal chair that exists only in your mind.

When **Aristotle** was a young man, about 350 BC, he went to study at Plato's Academy. Plato was already pretty old then. Aristotle did very well at the Academy. But he never got to be among its leaders, and when Plato died, Aristotle was not chosen to lead the Academy after him. Soon afterwards, Aristotle left Athens and went to Macedon to be the tutor of the young prince Alexander, who grew up to be Alexander the Great. As far as we

can tell, Alexander was not at all interested in learning anything from Aristotle, but they did become friends. When Alexander grew up and became king, Aristotle went back to Athens and opened his own school there, the Lyceum (lie-SAY-um), in competition with Plato's Academy. Both schools were successful for hundreds of years.

Aristotle was more interested in science than Socrates or Plato, maybe because his father was a doctor. He wanted to use Socrates' logical methods to figure out how the real world worked; therefore Aristotle is really the father of today's scientific method. Aristotle was especially interested in biology, in classifying plants and animals in a way that would make sense. This is part of the Greek impulse to make order out of chaos: to take the chaotic natural world and impose a man-made order on it. When Alexander was [traveling] all over Western Asia, he had his messengers bring strange plants back to Aristotle for his studies. Aristotle also made efforts to create order in peoples' governments. He created a classification system of monarchies, oligarchies, tyrannies, democracies and republics which we still use today.

The following passage is a selection of excerpts taken from <http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/philosophy/index.htm>

Use your knowledge of these Greek philosophers to answer the following questions and better understand the purpose of these philosophies. Please answer these questions in full sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What would the impact have been if these philosophers did not established institutions that taught these philosophies?
2. How else do we use Socrates' form of questioning in today's world?
3. Socrates never wrote down his own philosophies. Since Plato and Aristotle were the writers, could we just eliminate Socrates from the list of great Greek philosophers? Why or why not?
4. What if these philosophers were not asking questions about large, practical concepts in regards to society, politics, and daily life? How might that have changed the Greek empire?

