

PART II THE GRECO-ROMAN AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ROOTS

Chapter 5 Classical Greece: Philosophy and Ethical Thought

1. The Greeks are the first known to have attempted to understand their universe as an order governed by rational principals.
2. The word *philosophy* comes from the words *philo* and *sophia* and is a Greek term that means, “love of wisdom.”
3. The most ancient of the Pre-Socratic thinkers can be thought of as physicists because they sought a universal principal of rationality in the physical world.

I. The Pre-Socratics

1. Thales (640–546? B.C.) was the first in a line of philosophers from Miletus.
2. Legend credits Thales with bringing back knowledge of arithmetic and geometry from Egypt.
3. He was one of a group of thinkers called “monists” who believed all beings in the universe were composed of a single substance.
4. The sixth and early fifth centuries B.C. were fertile in philosophical thinking.
5. In Southern Italy, Pythagoras declared that all objects in the universe and the relationships between them were reducible to numbers.
6. The major group dominating Greece by the end of the fifth century were the Sophists, who taught the art of eloquence, and attacked the idea of absolute right and wrong.

II. Socrates (470?–399 B.C.)

1. Socrates opposed the skepticism and self-interest orientation of the Sophists.
2. Socrates believed that knowing begins with knowing what we do not know.
3. Socrates spent his days in the streets of Athens asking questions and numerous follow-up questions of his fellow citizens.
4. Socrates became known as the gadfly of Athens and was eventually put to death for corrupting the youth of Athens.

III. Plato (427?–347 B.C.)

1. Socrates never wrote anything, but his great disciple, Plato, immortalized him in many of his voluminous writings.
2. It is impossible to know how much of Plato’s thinking was derived from Socrates.
3. It was probably Plato who formulated Socrates’ questioning style into a formalized method.
4. Socrates seems to have been mostly concerned with ethics but Plato extends the Socratic method by exploring a wider variety of philosophical problems.
5. Plato believed the soul was a divine body buried within the body from which it escapes at death.

6. A loyal member of the Greek city-state, Plato believed the individual could not attain moral perfection within a corrupt society.

IV. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

A. The *Politics*

1. Aristotle wrote of the ideal man, but not the ideal woman.
2. He shared the common prejudices of his society with respect to women.
3. Aristotle's state views had long-term repercussions for women's rights.
4. Greek mythology and drama included many powerful women and the Greeks also explored feminine beauty.
5. Socrates advocated for equality between superior men and women.

B. The *Poetics*

1. Aristotle was the Western world's first literary critic.
2. Aristotle sought to define literary forms and to guide writers on how to proceed and structure their efforts.
3. Aristotle believed that poetry was superior to history because poetry dealt with the general and philosophical while history dealt with the particular.
4. Poetry not only imitates life, but leads to pleasure and self-knowledge for the audience, according to Aristotle.
5. Aristotle believed tragedy was the superior form compared to comedy and epic.
6. His work on comedy was never finished.