

The Athenian Zenith

The 5th and 4th Centuries B.C.E.



“Our city is an education to Greece!”

~ Pericles

“Oh you, olive shiny and violet crowned glorious Athens.

Famous in songs, the rampart of Greece, divine city.”

~ Pindar

*Athens, Intellectual Beacon, Fountainhead of Philosophy,
Birthplace of Socrates, Plato, Democracy, and of Western Civilization.*

“THE ATHENIAN ZENITH”

CHRONOLOGY: 5th c. — 4th c. BCE.

GEOGRAPHY: The Greek World

We call this era the ‘Athenian Zenith’ because Athens was *the* pre-eminent city-state at the time. Athens at its height was a prestigious cultural center, and very proud among all the other city-states. Greece not only gave us the Olympic Games, but Athenian thinkers achieved “Olympic Gold Medal” status in our:

History of “*faster, stronger, higher*” Thought! 🏆

ATHENS:

The Greeks have bequeathed quite a lot to Western Civilization, as you may recall from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding!* Periodically, humans extol and even try to revive those **Grecian Glory Days**...as we’ll see in later eras.

And now, after two and a half millennia, don’t we *still*...

Read their philosophers, rehash their dramas, revere their democracy, reprise their architecture, replay their sports, and revel in their art of rhetoric — by which we sell goods and win elections!

SOPHISTS:

A new kind of educator arose to meet that democracy’s need for instruction in debate and public persuasion...so, enter the Sophists — traveling salesmen of rhetoric!

Note the shift in interest **from** *the Cosmos* **to** *the Polis*...**from** *wondering* about the true nature of reality **to** *winning* regardless of truth and objective reality! In the “Appearances vs. Reality” problem, Sophists concluded that we *only* have appearances and must learn to effectively manipulate them.

☞ This makes Reality submit to **human subjectivity**, and everything **relative** to our competing viewpoints. 🗨️

This anthropocentrism was summed up by the most influential & ‘wisest-guy’ of all:

PROTAGORAS (480 — 410 BCE). His famous dictum was:

“Of all things man is the measure: of existing things, that they exist; of non-existing things, that they do not exist.”

Thus we *have* no other criterion; things EXIST only as they appear to US. 🗨️

This makes the Human Being the final arbiter of truth in the universe! WOW.

INFLUENCE TRAIL: 🗨️

Could we consider Protagoras a “*proto-Secular Humanist*”? (What did he say about the gods?) Was Thrasymachus somewhat of an early “Social Darwinist”? Did Gorgias “communicate” a view of communication that sounds rather postmodern? Good questions to think about. But here’s an easy question:

QUESTION: (a.) Think of three examples of ‘Sophist ideology’ found in our own society today. —

SOCRATES (469 — 399 BCE): “The Examiner”

Socrates was taught by Sophists, but in his ‘unprostituted’ search for universally objective truth, he became a universal archetype of a **TEACHER!** The “Socratic Method” (teaching by dialectical process, cross-examination, and mutual inquiry) is still one of the best! *The Dialogues* written by Plato and starring Socrates are actually fun to read. His place in history is obvious simply by the fact that we designate his predecessors **PRE-Socratic!**

QUESTION: (b.) Think of three reasons why Socrates has been dubbed “*The Greek Jesus*”! —

PLATO (427 — 347 BCE): “The Formulator”

Probably under Pythagorean influence (their separation of *formula* and matter) Plato developed his lofty Idea: The Theory of ‘Ideas’ or ‘Forms’—and based his entire system on it. Even the famous “Allegory of the Cave” is more than a metaphor for enlightenment — it illustrates his Metaphysics and Epistemology! (What exists/what is Real and how do we Know.)

“**Forms are known but not seen; things are seen but not known.**”

Study Plato's Simile of the Line carefully and understand that he ends up with a two-tiered worldview. In this dual system, the perfect form of **Circularity**, for example, is *more real* than particular circles & circular things.



Platonic Dualism and its tendency to adore the upper realm of perfection, has left a permanent mark on philosophy and theology. Behind so many tendencies in our thought lurks the hard to dispel spell of Platonism!

If you "bless your food" before eating it, rather than blessing the Lord for His good gifts of the earth, as a Hebraic believer would do...then I'm afraid you are still under the spell of Platonism!

QUESTION: (c.) According to Plato's psycho-social theory ("*The Republic is the individual writ large.*")... WHO should be the Rulers of a good republic, and why? —

Around 387 BCE, Plato started the first multi-subject, multi-teacher institution of higher learning in Western civilization. It was near a grove called *Academos*, thus we have our word "Academy." Plato's Academy lasted for nearly a millennium! (In the 6th c. CE, the Christian Emperor shut such institutions down for being pagan!)

Entering the Academy at the tender age of 18 was a student who turned out to be so brilliant that Plato called him "The Brain." Future generations simply called him **THE Philosopher**.

ARISTOTLE (384 — 322 BCE): "The Categorizer"

The "Brain" did not buy his mentor's theory about perfect forms existing somewhere over the rainbow. Form isn't a separate, much less other-worldly thing...it is merely the function that a thing has...the 'WHAT' it is supposed to be.

Aristotle interpreted **Form** and **Matter** as **Actuality** and **Potentiality**, and thus explained (along with the 4 types of causes) all apparent change and motion. His worldview is not dualistic, but pluralistic, dynamic, and teleological (goal directed.)

His most interesting idea is that of the **Final Cause**. All things move toward a telos (goal) and all reality is striving to Actualize its Potentiality. That's great, but...where is it all going???. Is there an Actuality that has no Potentiality? Is there some pure Form with no changing/moving Matter?

In other words, would we have an **Unmoved Mover**? Yes. This is Aristotle's absolute—the **Prime Mover**. But note: This *impersonal* entity (pure thought thinking thought) is still part of *this* world and *not* a transcendent-personal Creator.

Aristotle started his own academy — The Lyceum — which lasted for about 800 years. Plato's school emphasized mathematics, geometry and the *rationalistic* pursuits. The Lyceum was more of a center for scientific research and the *naturalistic* pursuits. In fact, Aristotle is famous for endeavoring to categorize all human knowledge, and we credit him with launching most of the scientific "*-ologies*"! We honor him for his "Golden Mean" Ethics, for founding Logic, and for tutoring the young man who would conquer the known world, thus setting the stage for our next era! He may not approve of this appellation, but he was *the* "Platonic Form" of a Philosopher!

QUESTION: (d.) To what did Aristotle equate the human's highest Goal/Purpose of Happiness? (Happiness = What?)

THEIR PLACE IN THE HALL OF FAME: Plato & Aristotle are the two central pillars supporting the entire Hall!

The history of Western Philosophy... "**consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.**" ~ Alfred North Whitehead, 1929

Generally speaking... "**everyone who thinks about philosophy at all is either a Platonist or an Aristotelian.**" ~ Norman Melchert

INFLUENCE TRAIL: It isn't a ...it's a super-highway. Take just these few examples:

Justin Martyr (100–165) was a Christian apologist who has been hailed as a 2nd Century Paul! He believed that the pre-incarnate *Logos* revealed truth to Socrates and Plato, making them like pre-Christ Christians!

Church Father Origen (185–254) taught that there were two separate creations, one for Pure Spirit, and one for Matter (to 'house' the fallen spirits!) Does that sound a bit Platonistic?

Platonism and mystical Neo-Platonism's impact on Christian Theology is *inestimable*. (At least impossible to estimate here!) When Aristotelian thought made a comeback in the late Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (13th c.) synthesized it with Catholic theology, as Augustine had done with Platonism in the 5th c.

Neo-Platonism had another "Renaissance" in Italy, when Marsilio Ficino set up an "Academy" in Florence! (15th c.)

And Friedrich Nietzsche (19th c.) even called Christianity "Platonism for the masses"! Now there's a footnote!

CONNECTION TO WORLDVIEW STUDIES:

In this Golden Age of Wisdom-Seeking Greek Philosophy we can see a progression from **Qs 1 & 2**, as pondered by the *Pre-Socratic* cosmologists, to **Qs 3 through 7**.

And, isn't it interesting that the Sophists dished out several 'isms' that are oh so Twentieth (and 21st) Century! This looks like a list of today's most popular worldviews:

relativism	subjectivism	skepticism	cynicism
agnosticism	hedonism	pragmatism	nihilism

But then, the greatest teacher-student succession in history came along: **SOCRATES—PLATO—ARISTOTLE** They "conversed" with all that had gone before, refuted the skepticism, and they wielded grand integrated systems of metaphysics and epistemology...even ethics, psychology, political science, logic, and art theory! Amazing. Their impact on the Western Mind is deep and enduring.

The basic difference between **Plato** and **Aristotle** regarding **FORMS** will reemerge later, so grasp it now! Here are some hints as to where the difference will be relevant:

In the *Medieval* debates between 'Realists' and 'Nominalists' on the reality and relation of 'Universals' and 'Particulars.' In the *Enlightenment Era* debates between Rationalists and Empiricists (Analytic vs. Synthetic propositions).

To help you remember, look at the highly symbolic image in the famous painting by Rafael, *The School of Athens*, where **Plato** points *up* to the realm of Forms and **Aristotle** spreads his hand *down* toward the ground! A special section on the painting has been included. It isn't required reading, but I hope you'll enjoy it anyway!

FOR WV DISCUSSIONS:

"The unexamined life is not worth living," said Socrates.

"The unexamined worldview is not worth believing," James Sire might say.

Can we *use this philosophy course* to get people to think about their lives more in terms of what Life IS rather than just 'making a living'? Whatever you 'SPEND' your life ON is the thing of real value!

It has been said that all of the various WVs are mere permutations of **either** Platonic **or** Aristotelian Metaphysics. Studying the major "isms" by virtue of their underlying assumptions about reality — do *you* find that they all fall into either Plato's transcendent dualism or Aristotle's teleological naturalism? Are there WVs that are **neither**?

What about the Biblical-Hebraic WV? ✨ Is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *anything* like "The GOOD" (Form of all Forms) or the "PRIME MOVER"?

Tertullian (c. 160–215) asked: "**What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What does the Academy have to do with the Church?**" Good discussion starter! Because there must be a relationship...but what?

Can Christians employ philosophy to theologize and evangelize *without* allowing alien metaphysics to distort the Biblical WV? Augustine said that the FORMS are "ideas in the mind of God." Even if that is true...how might we guard against compromising God's *special* revelation...which He gave to us in a distinctly Hebraic WV!?

(Holistic, not dualistic or monistic. Theocentric, and God is active, not impassible. He is unutterably Holy but still personal. Nature is good but fallen...but redeemable. The Human was made for relationship and community...not monasteries. Knowing God means obedient living, not mystical contemplation... *etc.*)

How about asking: "Does the Church *now* have more to do with *Athens* (any manmade institution, system or gimmick) than it does with *Jerusalem* (its authentic roots)?" (More to do with Rome, Geneva, Westminster, Chicago, or *God Forbid*, Lakewood, Texas?!) Oy Vay!

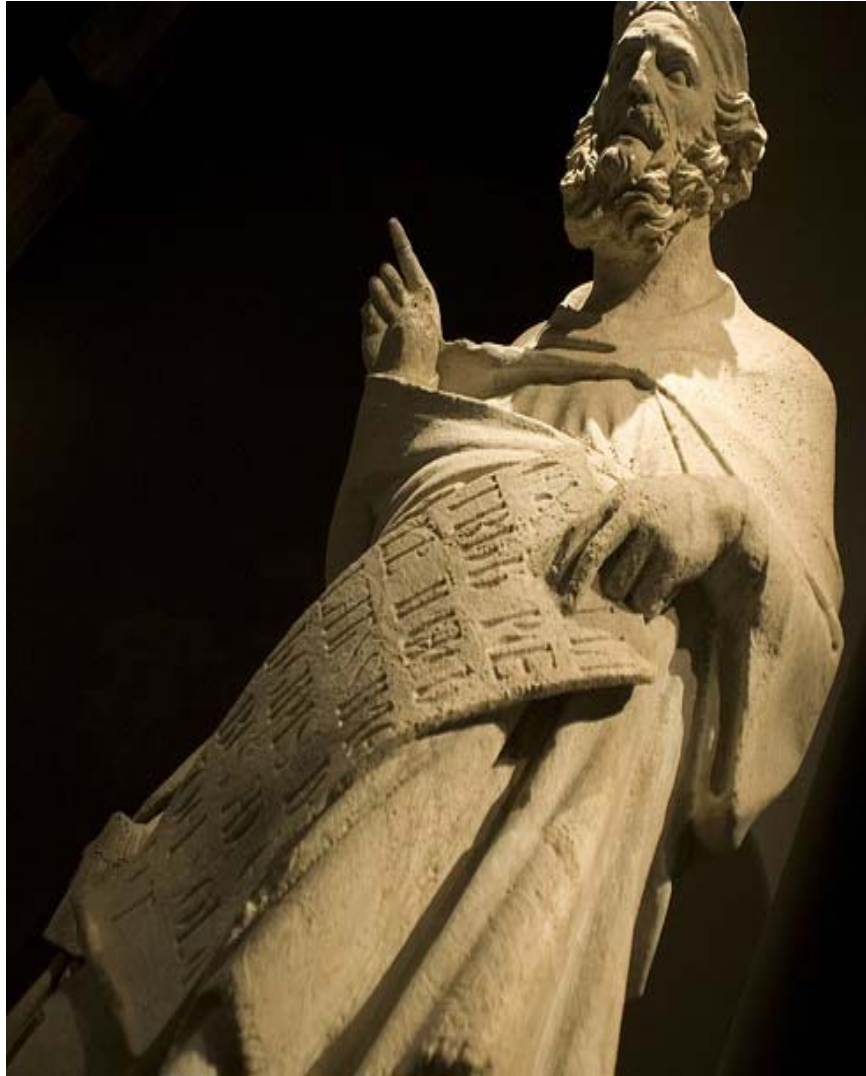
FOR FUN: (No, really!)

Go To: Prof. Daniel Kolak's "Lovers of Wisdom" website.

Find "WHO SAID...?" Look at the pictures ☒ and quotes and see how many you can match-up!

http://www.wpunj.edu/cohss/philosophy/Lovers/Lovers_of_Wisdom.html

DID YOU ANSWER THE 4 QUIZ QUESTIONS
IN THE TRANSCENDENT SUMMARY ABOVE?



“Fix your hearts on the reality of this course and you shall deserve the name Student.”

PLATO

(paraphrased somewhat)

NOW DON'T FORGET TO AT LEAST *GLANCE*
↓ AT THE SUBLIME SCHOOL OF ATHENS ↓

“THE SCHOOL OF ATHENS” by Raphael (1483–1520)

This famous fresco, completed around 1510, graces the *Stanza della Segnatura, Palazzi Pontifica*, at the Vatican.



Clockwise from **Aristotle** you can find, amongst several unnamed figures, *these* philosophers & mathematicians: Eudemus of Rhodes (350–290 BCE) Theophrastus (371–287 BCE) **Epicurus** (341–270 BCE) Aristippus (435–350 BCE) Pyrrho of Elis (360–270 BCE) Arcesilaus (316–242 BCE) Zoroaster (628–551 BCE) **Raphael** himself, next to his fellow fresco-painter Giovanni Sodoma, Ptolemy (c.85–165 CE) Euclid (c. 325 BCE) and Diogenes the Cynic (400–323 BCE) sprawled on the steps.

Counter-clockwise from **Plato** you can find:

Speusippus (347–339 BCE) Xenocrates (396–314 BCE) **Socrates** (470–399 BCE) Alexander the Great (366–323 BCE) Xenophon (430–355 BCE) Alcibiades (450–404 BCE) Aeschines (390–314 BCE) Critias of Athens (460–403 BCE) Diagoras of Melos (5th c BCE) **Zeno** of Elea (495–430 BCE) **Democritus** (c. 460–370 BCE) Diogenes of Laertius (early 3rd c.) **Anaximander** (610–547 BCE) Averroes (1126–1198) **Pythagoras** (582–507 BCE) **Anaxagoras** (c. 500–427 BCE) Hypatia (370–415 CE) **Parmenides** (b. 515? BCE) **Heraclitus** (535–475 BCE) (See Next Page for Who's Who)

The 'School' is an idealized community of great minds from around the classical world...like a 'timeless' academy. Some thinkers are Platonic, some are Aristotelian. In Raphael's day, would it be possible to synthesize the two monumental systems? Indeed, Neo-Platonic mysticism *and* scientific empiricism both continue into the Age of Reason!

Other intriguing features: The large white statues are of the deities Apollo and Athena, depicting the supremacy of reason and spirit over passion and desire. Not counting any cherubs or gods, there are nearly sixty figures in this painting. Raphael painted **Plato** resembling Leonardo da Vinci (who did not care for the Platonists!) He depicted **Euclid** as the great architect Bramante (whose designs for the new St. Peter's Basilica were underway!) and **Hypatia** as Francesca Maria della Rovere. The Persian mystic-prophet **Zoroaster** is Pietro Bembo, a humanist scholar. But the most interesting 'reincarnation' of all is that of the brooding **Heraclitus**. This is the only figure that was not in Raphael's original drawing for the painting. Experts believe that it is an homage to none other than the tempestuous **Michelangelo** (who was next door to this Stanza, in the Sistine Chapel, painting the ceiling!) Note the solid chunk of marble that he is leaning on.

Is it awaiting his chisel and his creative genius...or is it the chief cornerstone that the builders have rejected? [I Peter 2]

WHO'S WHO IN THE SUBLIME "SCHOOL OF ATHENS"

PLATO (429–347 BCE) A 'central' figure in the history of philosophy.

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BCE) Right next to him. They *are* the two main pillars of Western Philosophy!

Eudemus of Rhodes (350–290 BCE) Brilliant student & companion of Aristotle, and editor of his works. The first historian of science!

Theophrastus of Lesbos (371–287 BCE) Pupil and successor to Aristotle...but went in an empiricist and skeptical (not so *teleological*) direction while maintaining Aristotle's interest in scientific categorization.
Through his writings we know about Pre-Socratic views of nature.

Epicurus (341–270 BCE) Founder of the "Garden" commune. Influenced by Democritus' atomistic worldview, he taught that philosophy's purpose is a moderate, pleasant (*not* hedonistic) life free from the fear of death. If there are gods, they are indifferent to our lives, so why fear death?

Aristippus of Cyrene (435–350 BCE) A wealthy companion of Socrates.

Pyrrho of Elis (360–270 BCE) 'Be tranquilly content with mere appearances and be silently unspeculative about reality, so much else of human pursuit is vanity and childish folly'... the founder of classic Greek Skepticism seemed to believe!

Arcesilaus (316–242 BCE) Broke from Platonism and led Academy toward skepticism. Attacked Stoic rationalism.

Zoroaster (*Zarathustra*) (628–551 BCE) Founder of the dualistic religion that dominated Persia until Islam invaded. Zoroastrianism had spin-offs such as Manichaeism and Mithraism.

Rafael Sanzio (1483–1520) He's lookin' at you kid...and why *shouldn't* Rafael paint himself into this timeless school!

Giovanni Antonio Bazzi *aka- 'Il Sodoma'* (1477–1549) Another artist commissioned by Pope Julius II to paint frescos in the Vatican chambers.

Ptolemy (c.85–165 CE) Alexandrian astronomer & mathematician whose *geo-centric system* dominated until the 16th c!

Euclid (c. 325–265 BCE) Founder of Euclidean Geometry—the axiomatic method of which is a *model* of rational certainty!

Diogenes the Cynic (400–323 BCE) Founder of the shameless simple-living Cynics. Lived in Athens (and maybe Corinth.)

Speusippus (347–339 BCE) Plato's nephew, he succeeded him as head of the Academy and emphasized studies in abstract mathematics...which unfortunately lost them their greatest associate of all time—Aristotle—who wanted more interest in natural sciences.

Xenocrates of Chalcedon (396–314 BCE) He headed Plato's Academy (in Athens) from 339 to 314 BCE.

SOCRATES (470–399 BCE) Greatest philosophical Teacher of all time. "*The Socratic Method*"

Alexander the Great (366–323 BCE) Pupil of Aristotle, World Conqueror and purveyor of Hellenism (Greek culture.)

Xenophon (430–355 BCE) Greek general and historian who wrote respectfully of Socrates.

Alcibiades (450–404 BCE) Brought up in the house of Pericles, and greatly influenced by Socrates, he became a powerful statesman and military leader.

Aeschines (390–314 BCE) Athenian orator rivaling Demosthenes, he became powerful in politics (as *orators* often do!)

Critias of Athens (460–403 BCE) Poet, orator and politician. He had studied with Socrates, but as a cynical Sophist he became a cruel tyrant in the oligarchy set up by Sparta (after Sparta defeated Athens.)

Diagoras of Melos (5th c BCE) Sophist, poet, student of Democritus, but mostly known as an outspoken atheist (blatant denier of the gods and mystery cults!)

Zeno of Elea (495–430 BCE) Parmenides' student and ardent defender via his still-famous paradoxes.

Democritus of Abdera (c. 460–370 BCE) Founder (with Leucippus) of the deterministic worldview of ATOMISM.

Diogenes of Laertius (early 3rd c.) He wrote *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, giving to posterity a great source of biographical info on (and quotations from) our ‘Hall-of-Famers’ up to the 3rd c.

Anaximander (610–547 BCE) Student of Thales, he believed that the ‘underlying stuff’ could not be water but had to be something utterly apart from matter *and* form...something indeterminate and limitless. This “*apeiron*” would be the genesis of the cosmological processes via a conflict of opposites. Anaximander also made the first detailed model of the cosmos.

Averroes, aka Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) Influential Islamic philosopher who wrote commentaries on Aristotle’s works.

Pythagoras (582–507 BCE) A legendary mystical cult leader, and the philosopher who believed that the secret to understanding the cosmos was in numbers! (Numerical relations and proportions.)

Anaxagoras (c. 500–427 BCE) Famous for his insight that: “In all things, there is a portion of everything.” Infinite cosmic seeds are organized and animated by a mental force (*Nous*.)

Hypatia (370–415 CE) She was a brilliant astronomer and mathematician, but because she was a Neo-Platonist academy leader in Alexandria, she was kidnapped and tortured by Christian monks. She was scraped with oyster shells until she died, and the patriarch who ordered the gruesome killing was later canonized for his great piety.

Parmenides (b. 515? BCE) Pure rationalist and metaphysical monist who claimed motion and change were actually impossible because reality is an absolute fullness with no ‘empty space’ or non-being.

Heraclitus (535–475 BCE) “*The Riddler*” (he left us with pithy but puzzling sayings.) He seems to have taught that reality was like fire — a constant change but governed by a rational principle or “logos.”



Just try to imagine some of the **discussions** that would be taking place below!
What kinds of answers to the **Seven Basic Questions** would they be likely to offer?

