

LECTURE NO. 3

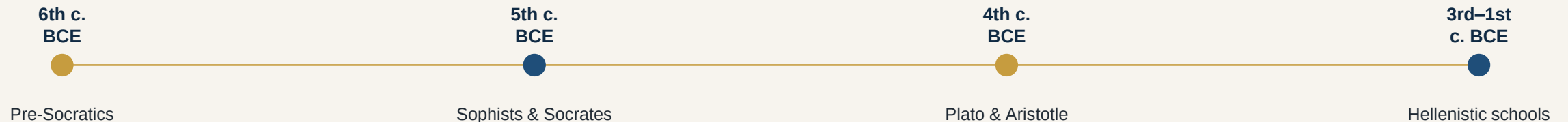
Ancient Greek Philosophy

From myth to logos, from cosmos to ethics, and from Plato to the Hellenistic schools

Lecture Plan

Five milestones in the development of Ancient Greek philosophy

- The genesis of reason: from myth to logos
- The anthropological turn: the Sophists and Socrates
- Plato's objective idealism: the world of ideas
- Aristotle: the great systematizer and critic of Plato
- Hellenistic schools: philosophy as a way of life



From Myth to Logos

I

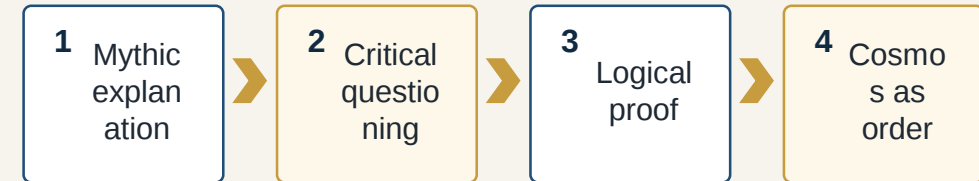
Why the “Greek miracle” was not accidental

- Greek philosophy emerged when explanation shifted from sacred stories to rational argument.
- The word logos ceased to be a spell or command and became an instrument of proof.
- This transition was supported by political freedom, trade, literacy, and open debate.
- Philosophy was born as a public activity inside the polis.

“

Philosophy is the child of the polis.

Central thesis of the lecture



Conditions for the Birth of Philosophy

I

Three historical forces behind rational thought

Political factor

The polis created a culture of civic freedom. Truth had to be discussed, defended, and justified in public speech rather than imposed by a ruler.

Economic factor

Greek colonization and maritime trade exposed thinkers to many customs and myths. Contact with difference weakened unquestioned tradition.

Religious factor

Greece lacked a rigid priestly caste monopolizing sacred truth. Intellectual space remained open for free speculation and criticism.

“

Thought became free because no single institution could close the debate.

The Alphabetic Revolution

I

Writing changed the structure of thought

Earlier pictographic systems

- Signs preserved a visual link with objects.
- Knowledge depended on memorizing thousands of symbols.
- Literacy stayed in the hands of narrow elites.
- Thinking remained tied to concrete images.

Greek alphabet

- Only 24 signs, including vowels, made learning faster.
- Knowledge became more democratic and more portable.
- Linear reading trained analysis into smaller components.
- Abstract thought became easier to stabilize and teach.

The Milesian Breakthrough

I

The first search for a rational arche of the universe

- In Miletus, the question changed from “Who gave birth to the world?” to “What is it made of?”
- The Milesians sought a primary principle (arche) that could explain many phenomena.
- This was the beginning of spontaneous materialism and the idea of nature as an ordered system.



“

The world ceased to be a toy of the gods and became a cosmos accessible to reason.

Thales: “All Is Water”

The first philosopher and the first unifying principle

- Thales was not only a thinker, but also an engineer, astronomer, and statesman.
- His thesis was revolutionary because it proposed one natural basis for all things.
- He looked for explanation inside the world itself, not in divine genealogy.
- The importance of Thales lies less in the element he chose than in the method he introduced.

Why water?

It appears in different states, nourishes life, and suggests transformation without losing identity.

Philosophical result

Reality can be explained by a universal natural principle discoverable by reason.



Anaximander and the Apeiron

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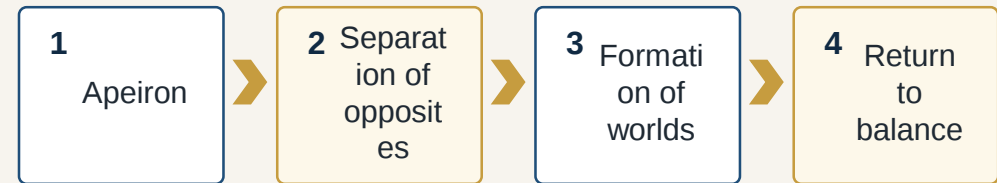
The discovery of the indefinite and the infinite

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If water is primary, how can fire—its opposite—arise from it?

Logical challenge behind Anaximander

- Anaximander rejected any single visible element as the source of all things.
- He introduced apeiron: the boundless, indefinite origin from which opposites emerge.
- This was a move toward greater abstraction and a more philosophical concept of origin.
- The universe becomes a lawful process of emergence and return.

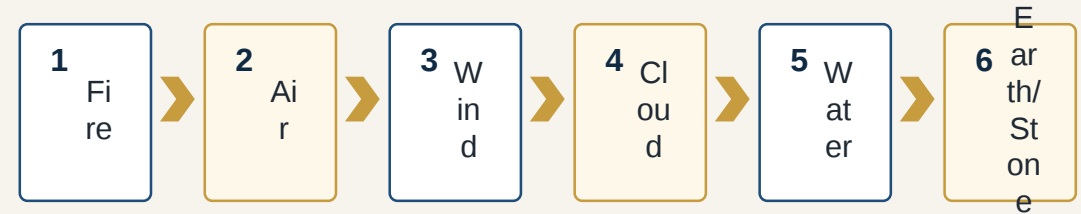


Anaximenes: Air and Mechanism

I

How the many arise from the one

- Anaximenes returned to a concrete element—air—but added a dynamic mechanism of change.
- Through rarefaction, air becomes fire; through condensation, it becomes wind, cloud, water, earth, and stone.
- For the first time, qualitative diversity was explained by quantitative variation.



“

Nature is not chaos: it changes through intelligible processes.

Pythagoras: Number and Harmony

A turn from substance to structure

- Pythagoras shifted philosophy from “What is the world made of?” to “How is the world ordered?”
- For the Pythagoreans, numerical relations explain music, proportion, and cosmic harmony.
- This was a decisive step toward idealism: form and relation become deeper than material stuff.

Key intuition

Reality has an intelligible mathematical structure.

Cosmos

Pythagoras helped popularize the vision of the world as an ordered arrangement rather than a random mass.

Music of the spheres

Planetary motion was imagined as a hidden cosmic harmony.



Heraclitus and Parmenides

I

The great metaphysical divide

Heraclitus

- Reality is flux and becoming.
- Conflict is productive and lawful.
- Fire symbolizes living change.
- Truth appears in dynamic oppositions.

Parmenides

- Being is one, ungenerated, and changeless.
- Non-being cannot be thought or spoken.
- Change and plurality are deceptive appearances.
- Truth is reached through strict logic.

Heraclitus: Reality as Becoming

Dialectics begins with conflict and motion

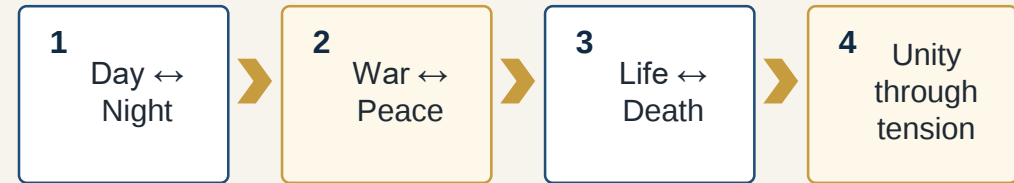
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You cannot step into the same river twice.

Traditional formulation of Heraclitus' insight

- The world is a living process, not a static inventory of things.
- Opposites are not mutually exclusive; they define and generate one another.
- Logos is the hidden law within change itself.
- Heraclitus becomes a precursor of later dialectical thinking.



Parmenides: The Rule of Logic

I

Ontology begins with the question of pure being

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Being is, and non-being is not.

Core thesis of Parmenides

- Parmenides distrusts the senses because they present contradiction, multiplicity, and change.
- Thought must follow what can be logically affirmed without contradiction.
- If non-being is impossible, then becoming is impossible: nothing can arise from nothing.
- He establishes the rational priority of logic over appearance.

Historical importance

Parmenides forces later thinkers to explain how real change can be possible at all.

Democritus and Atomism

A synthesis of permanence and motion

- Democritus solves the conflict between Heraclitus and Parmenides by introducing atoms and the void.
- Atoms are indivisible, eternal, and unchanging; they preserve being.
- The void makes movement possible; it explains plurality and transformation.
- Qualities such as color and taste arise from atomic combinations, not from intrinsic essences.

Atoms
● Indivisible ● Eternal ● Objective

- Differ by shape, order, position

Void
● Empty space ● Allows motion ● Makes plurality possible

- Separates atoms without destroying them



Pre-Socratic Legacy

What the first philosophers achieved

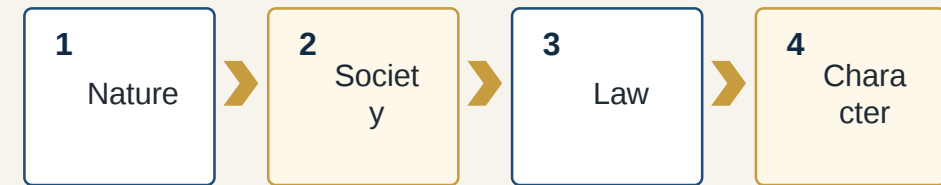
Thinker	Main principle	Contribution
Thales	Water	One natural source behind many things
Anaximander	Apeiron	Abstract origin beyond visible elements
Anaximenes	Air	Mechanism of change via rarefaction and condensation
Pythagoras	Number	Order and harmony as the essence of reality
Heraclitus	Flux	Dialectical vision of change and contradiction
Parmenides	Being	Logical defense of permanence and unity
Democritus	Atoms + void	Mechanistic synthesis of permanence and motion

The Anthropological Turn

II

From cosmos to the human being

- In the 5th century BCE, philosophy shifted from nature to the problems of law, morality, and persuasion.
- Athenian democracy made rhetoric and civic judgment central to public life.
- The new question was no longer only “What is the world?” but also “How should we live together?”
- Philosophy moved from physis to nomos and ethos.



“

Man became the central problem of philosophy.

The Sophists

II

Teachers of wisdom, rhetoric, and civic success

- The Sophists were the first paid intellectual professionals in Greece.
- They taught persuasion, argument, and practical success in democratic institutions.
- Truth in politics appeared less as discovery and more as negotiation, convention, and eloquence.
- Their work encouraged critical thinking but also made manipulation easier.

Historical role

They secularized education and made human affairs a legitimate object of philosophical attention.

Risk

Language can serve truth—or become a tool of strategic domination.

Protagoras and Relativism

II

"Man is the measure of all things"

“

Strength

- Tolerance of plural viewpoints
- Attention to human experience
- Critique of dogmatism

Danger

- Truth reduced to opinion
- Power of rhetoric over justice
- Difficulty grounding ethics

The Paradox of Protagoras

II

A classic lesson in sophistic reasoning

Agreement

Euathlus would pay his teacher only after winning his first court case.

Teacher's claim

If I win this case, you pay by the court's decision; if you win, you pay because it will be your first victory.

Student's reply

If I lose, I owe nothing by contract; if I win, I owe nothing by the verdict.

“

The paradox reveals how logic can be used not to find truth, but to entrap an opponent.



Socrates Against Relativism

II

Philosophy as a moral and intellectual conscience

- Socrates believed that if everyone has their own truth, community collapses into chaos.
- He searched for universal concepts such as justice, virtue, and the good.
- He taught not by lecturing, but by questioning hidden assumptions in dialogue.
- His mission was ethical: to care for the soul through examined living.

“

The unexamined life is not worth living.

Socratic ideal

Core opposition to Sophistry

Language must serve truth, not merely victory.

‘Know Thyself’ and the Socratic Method

II

Self-knowledge as the beginning of wisdom



- Socratic irony begins with the confession of ignorance.
- The elenchus tests definitions by revealing internal inconsistency.
- Knowledge and virtue are linked: to know the good is to be oriented toward it.
- Philosophy becomes an ethical practice of purification and self-formation.

The Trial and Death of Socrates

II

The final argument of a philosopher

- In 399 BCE, Socrates was accused of impiety and corrupting the youth.
- He refused rhetorical self-defense and would not abandon his principles to save his life.
- Even when escape was prepared for him, he chose obedience to law over personal survival.
- His death transformed him into a martyr for philosophical integrity.

“
For Socrates, loyalty to truth was more important than biological survival.



Sophists vs. Socrates



An enduring debate in Western culture

Question	Sophists	Socrates
Truth	Relative and situational	Universal and worth seeking
Language	Tool of persuasion	Tool of clarification
Goal	Success in civic life	Care for the soul
Teacher role	Professional instructor	Moral midwife through dialogue
Ethics	Convention-based	Grounded in reason and virtue

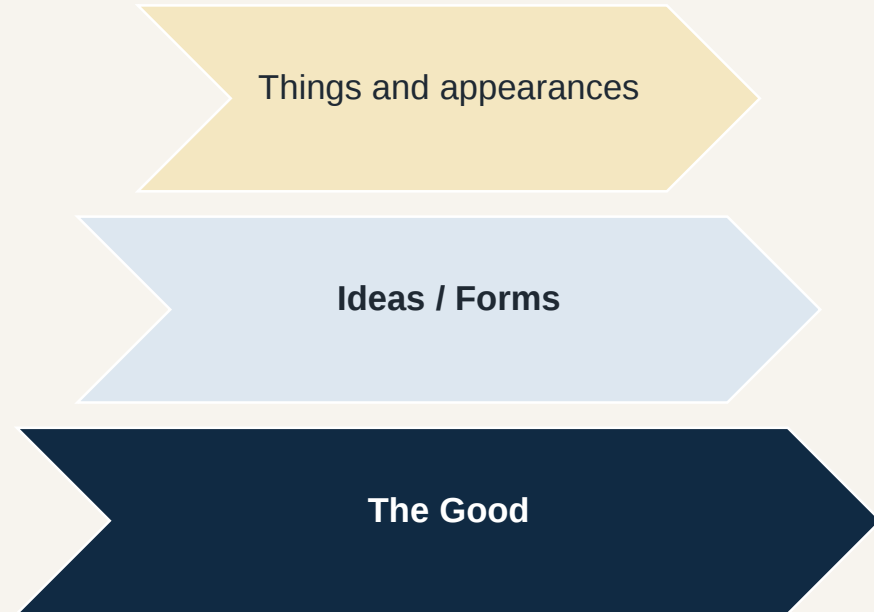
“*The Sophists liberated the mind from dogma; Socrates sought a firm moral foundation within that freedom.*”

Plato's Objective Idealism

III

The first grand metaphysical system

- Plato transforms Socratic inquiry into a universal architecture of reality.
- He divides existence into two levels: the eternal world of ideas and the changing world of things.
- Ideas are true being; sensible things are imperfect copies.
- The highest task of philosophy is to ascend from appearance to intelligible truth.



Two Worlds in Plato

III

True being versus changing appearances

World of Ideas

- Eternal, perfect, immutable
- Accessible to reason, not the senses
- Contains the forms of beauty, justice, equality, and more
- Serves as the blueprint for all finite things

World of Things

- Temporal, imperfect, perishable
- Given through sense perception
- Always becoming and never fully stable
- Imitates or participates in ideal forms

The Allegory of the Cave

III

Plato's most famous image of human ignorance



- Prisoners mistake shadows for reality because they have never seen the source.
- Education is not the filling of an empty mind, but a turning of the soul toward truth.
- The ascent from the cave symbolizes philosophical liberation from illusion.
- The return to the cave reflects the political duty of the philosopher.

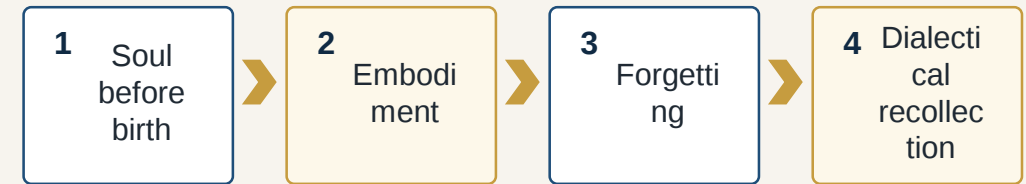


Anamnesis: Knowledge as Remembrance

III

Learning awakens what the soul already knows

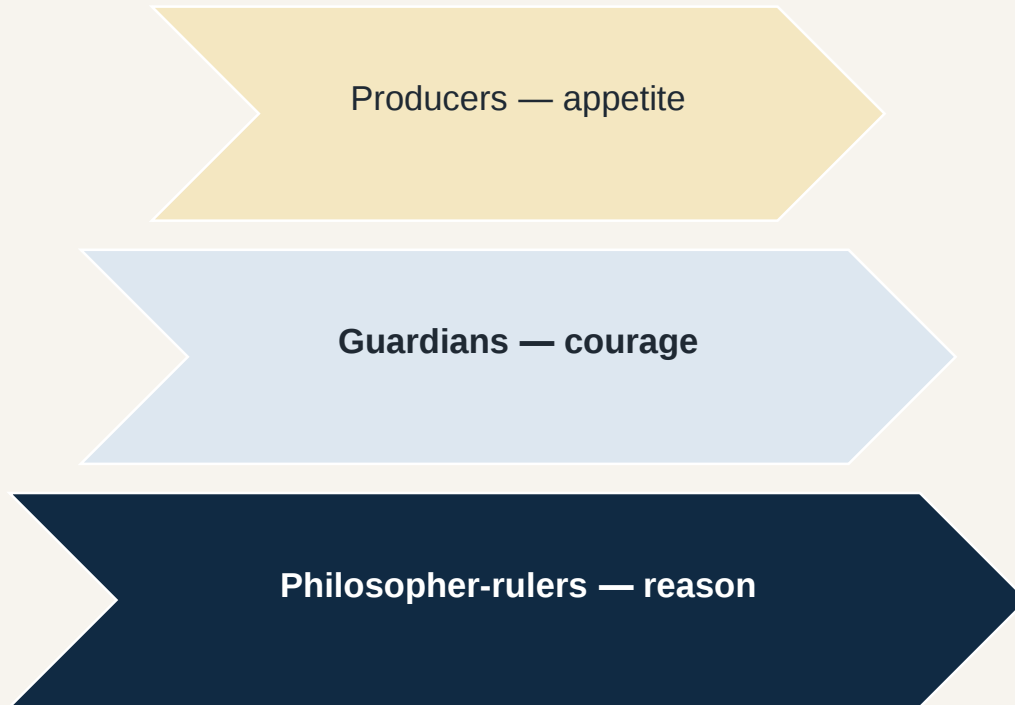
- Plato explains knowledge by the immortality and pre-existence of the soul.
- Before birth, the soul contemplated the world of ideas; earthly learning recalls that vision.
- A true teacher does not simply transfer data, but helps memory and intellect awaken.
- This gives philosophy an inward, spiritual dimension.



Plato's Ideal State

Justice as harmony under the rule of reason

III



- Plato models the state on the structure of the soul.
- Justice exists when each part performs its proper function under rational order.
- Democracy appears dangerous because opinion can overpower wisdom.
- The philosopher is qualified to rule because they know the good.

The Academy

III

Plato's institutional legacy

- Founded around 387 BCE, the Academy became the first major higher school in Europe.
- It functioned not merely as a school, but as a research community devoted to disciplined thought.
- It lasted for nearly a thousand years and shaped the intellectual model of future universities.
- Aristotle studied there before creating his own system.

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The Academy marks the separation of philosophy from myth, religion, and everyday opinion.

387 BCE



Founded

4th c.
BCE



Aristotle studies

529 CE

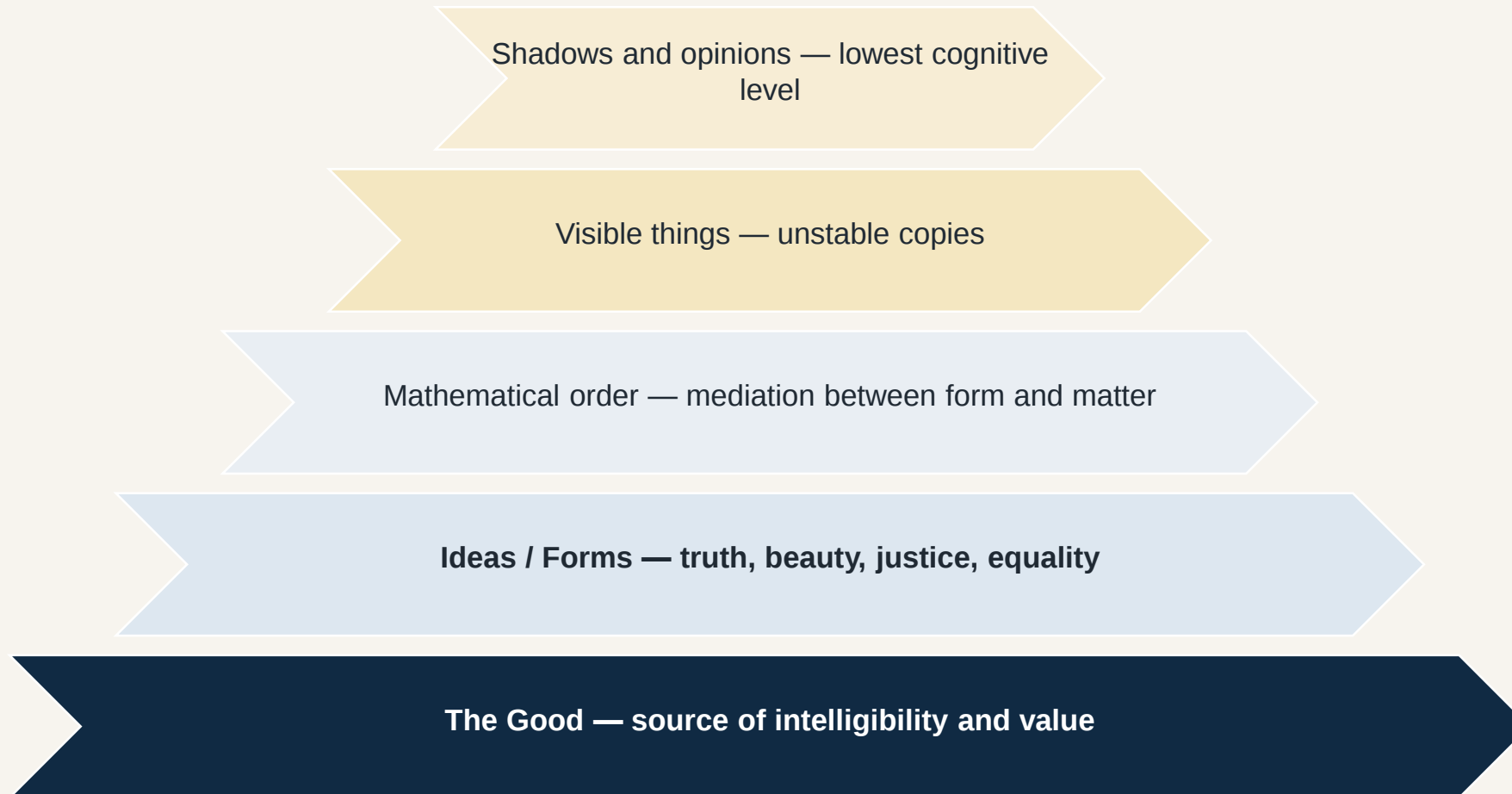


Closed by Justinian

Hierarchy of Plato's Reality

III

From the visible to the intelligible



Aristotle: Philosophy Comes Down to Earth

IV

The great systematizer of antiquity

- Aristotle accepts Plato's search for form, but rejects the separation of ideas from concrete things.
- He studies logic, biology, ethics, politics, metaphysics, and poetics in a single integrated framework.
- Where Plato emphasizes transcendence, Aristotle emphasizes analysis of actual substances.
- Philosophy becomes a science of reality in its many levels and causes.

Historical image

If Plato points upward, Aristotle observes the world in front of us.

Method

Classify, compare, define, infer, and explain through causes.

Hylomorphism

IV

Every concrete thing is matter informed by form

Matter (hyle)

- Potentiality
- What a thing is made of
- By itself, indeterminate
- Needs form to become an actual substance

Form (morphe)

- Actuality
- What makes a thing the kind of thing it is
- Organizing principle within the object
- Not a separate heavenly entity

The Four Causes

Aristotle’s complete answer to the question “Why?”



Cause	Question	Example: statue
Material	What is it made of?	Bronze
Formal	What is its structure?	The design or shape
Efficient	Who made it?	The sculptor
Final	For what purpose?	To honor or decorate

The Prime Mover and the Lyceum

IV

Causality, intellect, and the peripatetic school

- To avoid an infinite regress of causes, Aristotle posits a first principle: the Prime Mover.
- It moves all things not by physical pushing, but as the ultimate object of desire and thought.
- After Plato's death, Aristotle founded the Lyceum, where teaching often took place while walking.
- His school joined observation, classification, and reasoning into a long-lasting scholarly method.

Prime Mover

Pure actuality, pure intellect, final source of order.

Lyceum

A research community focused on logic, science, and empirical inquiry.

Plato and Aristotle Compared

Two enduring models of philosophy

Theme	Plato	Aristotle
Where truth lies	In transcendent ideas	In forms within concrete substances
Method	Dialectical ascent	Logical and empirical analysis
Politics	Rule of the wise	Study of constitutions and practical life
Knowledge	Remembrance of forms	Abstraction from experience
Tone	Visionary and normative	Systematic and scientific

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Plato asks what ought to be; Aristotle asks what is and why it is so.

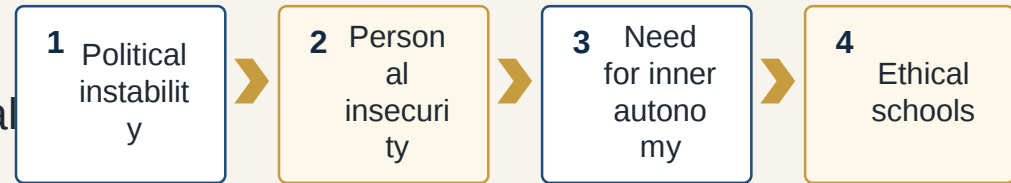


The Hellenistic Shift

v

Philosophy becomes therapy for the soul

- After Alexander, the world of the polis broke open into vast empires and unstable identities.
- The central question changed: how can a person remain inwardly free amid external uncertainty?
- Philosophy turned from grand cosmology toward practical guidance for serenity and self-mastery.
- Ataraxia—peace of mind—became a major ethical ideal.



Stoicism

v

Duty, reason, and agreement with fate

- Founded by Zeno of Citium, Stoicism teaches that the universe is governed by rational logos.
- We cannot control external events, but we can govern our judgments and responses.
- Apatheia means freedom from destructive passions, not emotional emptiness.
- The ethical goal is to live according to nature and reason, fulfilling duty under all conditions.

Stoic formula

Control what is yours; accept what is not.

Ideal figure

The wise person remains inwardly free even in misfortune.

Epicureanism

v

Pleasure as the absence of suffering

- Epicurus returned to atomism, but turned it into an ethics of measured happiness.
- The highest good is not excess, but freedom from pain, fear, and mental disturbance.
- Simple pleasures, friendship, and philosophical reflection create stable well-being.
- Fear of gods and fear of death are major enemies of peace.

What Epicurus values

- Moderation
- Friendship
- Security
- Mental tranquility

What he rejects

- Luxury as a goal
- Political ambition
- Irrational fear
- Needless desire

Skepticism

v

Suspending judgment to gain serenity

- Pyrrhonian Skeptics doubt that the human mind can reach certain truth about reality.
- Because claims conflict and certainty is fragile, one should suspend judgment (epoché).
- This does not destroy life; it frees the person from dogmatic anxiety.
- Peace comes not from possessing final truth, but from releasing the need to force certainty.

“

*Where certainty cannot be secured,
tranquility may still be preserved.*

Ethical effect

Doubt becomes a medicine against fanaticism and inner disturbance.

Three Hellenistic Answers

Different roads to ataraxia

School	What causes distress?	How peace is achieved
Stoicism	Attachment to what we cannot control	Duty, rational self-command, acceptance of fate
Epicureanism	Pain, fear, and unnecessary desire	Moderation, friendship, freedom from disturbance
Skepticism	Dogmatic certainty and intellectual conflict	Suspension of judgment and inner calm

“All three schools ask the same practical question: how can a human being live well in an unstable world?”

What Ancient Greek Philosophy Gave Us

Legacy

A lasting framework for Western thought

- The rational method: logos, argument, proof, and conceptual clarity.
- The search for ultimate principles: substance, form, cause, being, and law.
- The ethical project of self-knowledge and the examined life.
- Institutional models of education, inquiry, and public debate.
- Philosophy as both theory of reality and art of living.

Logic and rational inquiry

Metaphysics and ontology

Politics and education

Ethics and inner freedom

From Thales to the Stoics

Legacy

The arc of ancient thought



- Ancient philosophy begins by asking what the world is made of and ends by asking how to live within it.
- Its history is a movement from cosmos, to man, to ideal order, to science, and finally to existential resilience.
- That is why Greek philosophy remains the foundation of later metaphysics, ethics, politics, and education.

Conclusion

End

Ancient Greek philosophy as a school of freedom

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The Greeks transformed chaos into cosmos, opinion into argument, and life into a problem worthy of reason.

- Pre-Socratics discovered rational explanation in nature.
- Socrates and Plato shifted philosophy toward truth, justice, and the soul.
- Aristotle organized knowledge into a systematic science.
- The Hellenistic schools taught inward steadiness in a changing world.

Thank you

