Ancient Greek Philosophy:
Socrates, Plato, & Aristotle [15 points]

Read the excerpts from "Plato: Founder of Western Philosophy" (yellow handout) carefully. In your own words, address FIVE of the following. You must answer at least TWO of the bold-faced questions. Write a brief paragraph [3-5 sentences] for each response [3 points each].

1) Why did Socrates make so many enemies in Athens? Explain.

2) Identify, explain, & place in historical context:
> "Shall I not obey the laws, which have protected me until now? I stood my ground in the army, where my generals posted me; shall I not stay at my post now, where the gods have placed me?"

3) **How did Plato distinguish between the "world of the senses" & the "world of the forms"? For him, which was more important? Explain.**

4) What roles did "guardians" play in Plato's ideal polis as explained in *The Republic*?

5) What was Plato's theory of "mixed government" as detailed in the *Laws*?

6) **Identify, explain, & connect to Aristotle's idea of the "Golden Mean":**
> **"It is no easy task to find the middle… Wherefore, goodness is rare and laudable and noble."**

7) How is Aristotle linked to the Constitution of the United States? Elaborate.

8) Identify, explain, & place in historical context:
> "The element which is able, by virtue of its intelligence, to exercise forethought is naturally a ruling and master element; the element which is able, by virtue of its bodily power, to do the physical work, is a ruled element, which is naturally in a state of slavery."

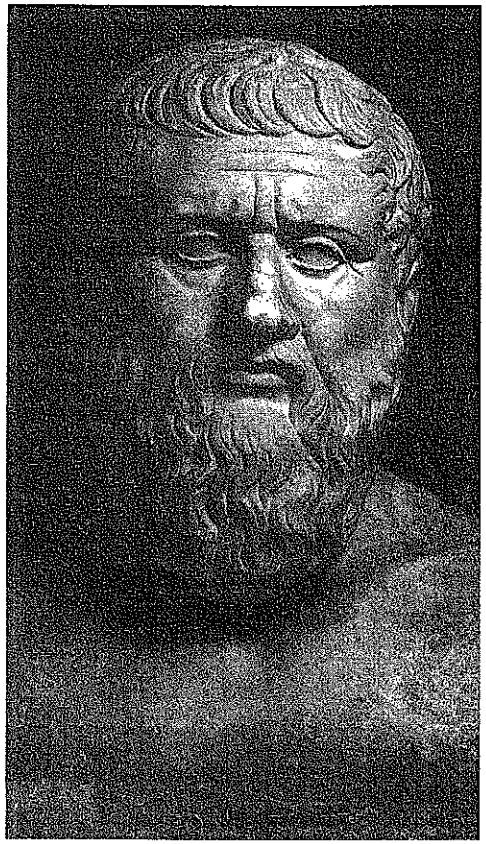
9) **Elaborate on the following statement: "Perhaps the most versatile philosopher in human history, Aristotle single-handedly created the Western curriculum"**

BONUS POINTS [1 point each]

1) Who was called "the Philosopher" and "the master of those who know" by the medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas?
2) What term did Socrates use in describing himself regarding his essential service to sting Athenian citizens out of their lethargy?
3) Who wrote "If a friend becomes wicked, it is necessary to lead him back into goodness"?
4) Who wrote "Only the dead have seen the end of war"?
5) Who said "Crito, we owe a cock to Asceplius. Pay it, and don't forget now."?
6) What was Plato's real name?

What are the main differences between the first set of questions and the bonus questions? Which require a demonstration of deeper historical understanding?

from Twelve Greeks and Romans who Changed the World (2003) by Carl J. Richard



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Plato: Founder of Western Philosophy

Before Plato, Greek "philosophers" were mostly scientists who studied the laws of the physical universe. It was Plato who began a sophisticated inquiry into such matters as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and the other issues that have come to define what we now term "philosophy." Not only has Platonism exerted a considerable influence throughout Western history, but every opposing philosophy was either formed in opposition to it or, at the very least, was compelled to come to grips with Plato's arguments. It was Plato, more than any other philosopher, who set the terms for philosophical discourse up to this very day. Alfred Lord Whitehead's famous exaggeration, "All of western civilization is but a series of footnotes to Plato," becomes more accurate if one but substitutes "philosophy" for "civilization."

SOCRATES (c. 470–399 B.C.)

So much of what we know of Socrates' philosophical beliefs comes from dialogues written by Plato, his most brilliant student, that many intellectual historians question whether we can rightly speak of a Socratic philosophy independent of Platonism. How many of the opinions that Plato ascribed to Socrates in the dialogues were really Socratic, and how many were merely Plato's own views? Regardless of one's position on this question, it seems certain that Plato studied under a charismatic man named Socrates and that Socrates' life, death, and beliefs exerted a profound influence on Plato.

A pronouncement of the oracle of Delphi first led Socrates, the son of a sculptor and a midwife, on a search for philosophical truth. When asked by one of Socrates' friends if Socrates was the wisest man in the world, the oracle had replied, "Wise is Sophocles, wiser is Euripides, but wisest of all is Socrates." This declaration had astonished Socrates. He could not believe that he was the wisest man in the world, since he did not think he knew anything at all. But surely Apollo would not lie. Socrates began to question all Athenians reputed to be wise—politicians, playwrights, and craftsmen—to discover if any were wiser than he. Employing the "Socratic method," an intense line of questioning aimed at defining objects and ideas and refining propositions by examining their logical consequences, Socrates revealed numerous inconsistencies in the arguments of these "wise men." Socrates finally concluded that the oracle's statement was "a kind of joke": Socrates was the wisest man because he alone recognized his own ignorance.

By making fools of the leading men of Athens, to the delight of the city's youth, who began to idolize and emulate Socrates (they also admired his fearlessness in combat and his ability to drink immense amounts of wine without any visible effect), Socrates helped bring about his own death. Socrates created other enemies in the city by finding fault with democracy, by speaking well of the dreaded enemy, Sparta, and by criticizing the traditional portrayal of the gods. He believed, contrary to the stories recited by the poets, that the gods were completely virtuous and that they did not honor the sacrifices of the wicked. Still other critics of Socrates noted that both the traitor Alcibiades and the bloodthirsty tyrant Critias had been his students. Some Athenians recalled that Critias had written a poem claiming that the gods were the invention of an ingenious ruler, who had hoped to make evildoers fearful of an all-seeing eye. Although nothing could have been further from Socrates' beliefs, and though Socrates had once risked his own life by defying Critias's order that he arrest one of Critias's political opponents, many Athenians assumed that Socrates was responsible for Critias's cynicism. Finally, Anytus, one of the most powerful men in Athens (one of the two men who had led a successful revolution against Critias and the Thirty Tyrants), was angry with Socrates for turning his son against him by filling his head with philosophy. When Anytus ordered his son to devote his time to the family tannery rather than pursuing Socratic philosophy, the young man became a bitter drunkard.

In 399 B.C., Socrates was arrested for impiety and for corrupting the youth. Socrates was convicted by a jury vote of 281 to 220, a relatively close margin. Even then Socrates could have avoided death by offering exile as his punishment. Instead, he proposed a fine of 3,000 drachmas, to be paid by his friends, since he himself possessed only 100 drachmas. Even this penalty he offered only belatedly and with great reluctance. His first suggestion had been that *the city should pay him* for his essential service as a "gadfly" who stung the citizens out of their lethargy. Indeed, he had declared: "Being convinced that I have wronged no man, I certainly will not wrong myself; I will not give a sentence against myself and say that I am worthy of something bad." Outraged by his insolence, the jury chose the death penalty (the prosecutors' alternative) by a larger margin than that which had convicted him.

Socrates' final address to the jury, as recorded in Plato's *Apology of Socrates* ("apology" meant an explanation or defense; Socrates never apologized for anything), remains one of the most powerful speeches in Western history. Socrates declared: "It is not death which is difficult to escape, gentlemen; no, it is far more difficult to escape wickedness, which pursues us more swiftly." He warned those who had convicted him not to rejoice too quickly:

> You have done this thing to me in the hope that you might thus avoid having to give an account of your lives, but I tell you that the result will be just the opposite of what you expected. For now there will be many who will call you to account, men whom I have held back, though you were not aware of it. They are young men, and so they will be more severe with you, and you will be even angrier and more upset than you are now. You are mistaken if you think that by putting men to death you will prevent anyone from chastising you for not living as you should.

To those who had voted for his acquittal, Socrates concluded affectionately:

> And you also, judges, must regard death hopefully and must remember this one truth: that no evil can come to a good man, either in life or after death, and the gods do not neglect him. . . . When my sons are grown, I would ask you, my friends, to punish them, and I would have you trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about money, or anything else, more than virtue; or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing, then reprove them, as I have reproved you, for not caring about that which they ought to care, and for thinking that they are something when they are really nothing. And if you do this, both I and my sons will have received justice at your hands. And now is the hour to depart, I to die, and you to live. Whichever of these fates is the better one is by no means clear to anyone, except to the gods.

Socrates then rejected an informal arrangement that would have allowed him to escape Athens. He told his friend Crito, who urged him to flee, that he did not wish to live in another polis, to dislocate his sons, and to put his friends' lives and property in peril. But, more importantly, he noted, in a quintessentially Greek fashion, that the "Law," which had given him life (his mother and father had been married through it) and nourishment, was even more worthy of respect than one's parents, since it was the lifeblood of the entire polis. By remaining in Athens when he had come of age, he had consented to be governed by its laws. Should he now break this solemn covenant in order to gain a few more years of life? (He was seventy years old.) And what kind of life would it be? One without self-respect or the respect of others. For it was not the Law itself, but a mere jury of men, that

had injured him. If he were to raise his hand against the Law, he would place himself in the wrong, destroy his whole life's work, and make a mockery of his own teachings concerning virtue. How could he be trusted in any other decent polis if he showed contempt for the laws of his own? Would he not validate the unjust decision against him; would it not appear likely that a corrupter of laws might also have been a corrupter of youth? Socrates asked: "Shall I not obey the laws, which have protected me until now? I stood my ground in the army, where my generals posted me; shall I not stay at my post now, where the gods have placed me?"

Socrates was executed with a cup of hemlock. He went to his death serenely, saying that he was looking forward to meeting *and questioning* all of the great figures of history. He assumed that they would not evict him from Hades for asking questions. He assured his weeping friends that only his body, which was but a meaningless shell, would die. The real "Socrates" was the soul, not the body, and the soul was immortal. Complete truth could be acquired by the soul only after death, since "so long as we have the body with us in our inquiry, and our soul is mixed up with so great an evil, we shall never attain sufficiently what we desire, and that, we say, is truth." Hence, of all people, philosophers should most welcome death: "If you see a man fretting because he is to die, he is not really a philosopher but a philosoma—not a wisdom-lover but a body-lover." Socrates hinted that only philosophers enjoyed a blessed state of complete wisdom, as companions of the gods, in the afterlife. Like the Pythagoreans, but far less dogmatically, Socrates intimated the possibility of reincarnation for other souls: souls virtuous by "habit and custom without philosophy" entered into new human bodies, while impure souls entered into animal bodies or became shadowy apparitions wandering the earth. When one of Socrates' students offered him a beautiful garment in which to die, Socrates said: "What, is my own good enough to live in but not to die in?" Socrates' last words were: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Pay it, and don't forget now." Most historians believe that Socrates was referring to a severe illness from which Plato had just recovered: those who recovered from an illness were expected to donate a chicken to the priests of Asclepius, the god of healing. But there is another, more intriguing possibility—that the cock was for himself, that Socrates was equating his own passage from this miserable world into a better existence with the healing of an illness. At any rate, Socrates' execution transformed him into a martyr for philosophy, virtue, and free speech, an enduring inspiration to countless people for 2,400 years.

Drawing on the Pythagoreans, Socrates had argued for the existence of natural law, a universal code of ethics, divine in origin, that remained the same at all times and in all societies and that could be discerned by human intuition. He claimed that there were "unwritten laws" that had been formulated by the gods and that were "uniformly observed in every country." The duty to revere the gods and one's parents were two such

laws. He argued that humans were innately good. The understanding of good and evil was imbedded in human nature and accessible through intuition, rather than through reason (logic) acting on sensory experience. Socrates explained that the body was an "obstacle" to knowledge. He contended: "And the best sort of thinking occurs when the soul is not disturbed by any of these things—not by hearing, or sight, or pain, or pleasure—when she leaves the body and is alone and, doing her best to avoid any form of contact with it, reaches out to grasp what is truly real."

Partly as a result of this emphasis on intuition over the senses, Socrates led a fairly ascetic life. He pitied those who devoted their lives to insignificant things like making money. He declared: "A life without examination is not worth living." (Significantly, he did not say, "The unexamined life is not worth living," as he is frequently mistranslated. It was as important to examine others as to examine oneself. Had Socrates merely examined himself, he never would have gotten into trouble.) He once said that other men seemed to live only that they might eat, while he ate only that he might live. Once, when Socrates invited some rich men over to his humble abode and his wife, Xanthippe, was ashamed of the dinner, he told her: "Never mind, for if they are reasonable they will put up with it, and if they are worthless, we shall not trouble ourselves about them." When walking through the marketplace, Socrates once exclaimed: "How many things there are that I can do without!"

But Socratic (and Platonic) claims that sensory experience was an obstacle to knowledge were inconsistent with Socrates' equally prominent statements on the importance of education. Socrates (and Plato) often suggested that education (ethical training, which employs reason and the senses) was essential to perfecting the innate goodness of humans, an insight that later formed the core of Stoicism.

Socrates' equation of virtue with wisdom also left out the vital element of willpower. Socrates claimed: "Justice and every other form of Virtue is Wisdom. . . . He who knows the beautiful and good will never choose anything else." This formulation denied the possibility that one could know the good in a rational sense yet be unable to achieve it because of the sensual lure of evil. Indeed, in Plato's touching *Symposium,* an emotional and thoroughly intoxicated Alcibiades tells Socrates that he knows he should be virtuous, and tries, but is rarely able. Plato seemed not to note that the anecdote revealed a flaw in Socratic and Platonic theory—a flaw that is hardly surprising, since Greek tradition lacked the Judaic concept of original sin.

PLATO (c. 428–347 B.C.)

At the very least, Plato systematized and expanded Socratic philosophy. A champion wrestler, Plato (his real name was Androcles; "Plato" was a

nickname referring to either his "wide" body or "broad" forehead) had become a student of Socrates at the age of twenty. In the wake of Socrates' execution, Plato left Athens and traveled to southern Italy and Sicily. From the Pythagoreans there, especially Archytas of Tarentum, he learned the importance of mathematics. He then returned to Athens, where he established the Academy in 387 B.C. Located in the groves one mile west of Athens, near the shrine of the local hero Academus, the Academy was a school of higher education that taught philosophy, astronomy, biology, mathematics, and political theory. It operated for nearly a millennium before the Byzantine emperor Justinian closed it in A.D. 524.

Platonism combined the insights of Heraclitus with those of Pythagoras. Plato argued, as had Heraclitus, that the world of the senses was an imperfect world that remained in a constant state of flux. Thus, human knowledge of the material world was limited not only by the imperfection of the senses, but also by the fluctuating nature of matter itself. But Plato also believed, as had Pythagoras, in another, perfect world, the "world of the forms," in which ideas like beauty and justice lived a real and eternal existence. The world of the senses was but a shadow, a pale imitation of the real world, the world of the forms. All human ideas, whether of material objects or of concepts, were intuitive representations of immaterial forms existing on another plane. Dispersed throughout the universe, the divine soul continually acted on matter in an effort to replicate the forms within the world of the senses. But matter, by its inherently disorderly nature, passively resisted the order that the divine soul sought to impose on it, so that the material world that resulted, while the best of all possible material worlds, did not conform perfectly to the world of the forms. The human soul, eternal like the divine soul, the forms, and matter, was a dismembered portion of the divine soul that temporarily occupied a body composed of matter.

Plato's theory of ethics proved as influential as his metaphysics. He identified the four cardinal virtues as prudence, temperance, justice, and courage, a list that would be repeated not only by Platonists but by other philosophical schools for centuries thereafter.

Disillusioned with the democratic government of Athens even before it had executed his mentor, Plato wrote *The Republic* in 374 B.C. In this dialogue, Plato presented his ideal polis, a city ruled by an aristocracy of thoroughly educated "guardians" led by a "philosopher-king." Since these wise guardians would be able to distinguish the true good (truth, justice, and virtue, which were accessible only through philosophical understanding) from the false good (wealth, power, and prestige), they would consider their governing function an obligation rather than a source of loot. Plato wrote: "The city where those who are to rule are least anxious to be rulers is of necessity the best managed." The guardians would govern in the best interests of the people, who would be divided

into warriors and workers. (Plato believed that war was a fact of human life, writing: "Only the dead have seen the end of war." Indeed, if later writers can be believed, Plato himself had fought valiantly in the Athenian army.) The three groups in Plato's republic corresponded to the three parts of the soul (mind), in descending order of importance: wisdom, love of honor, and love of pleasure. Plato's Spartan-style system made the citizen a specialist, contrary to the traditional Greek emphasis on versatility.

The guardians would control all aspects of life, including marriage. To prevent selfishness among the guardians, all of their property would be held in common, and their children would be taken from them at birth and raised communally by all of the adults, so that none would even know which was his own child. Once women were past the child-bearing age, they could mate with whomever they wished. All illegitimate children and those "born defective" would be killed at birth. The guardians would make a careful determination of each individual's proper place in society. Those able to grasp the nature of the forms and to apply them to practical situations—that is, the virtuous and the wise—would be placed on the guardian track. They would be taught mathematics and logic, which employed "pure reason" to comprehend the changeless Idea of the Good, and would undergo physical training, to prevent softness. They would be prohibited from studying "anything that is not perfect"—meaning anything associated with the flawed, ever-changing material world. They would be prohibited from drunkenness or idleness. Those who failed the numerous intellectual and physical tests administered to them throughout their lifetimes would be demoted as unfit to share in the rule. Those who passed these tests would participate in the government of the city after age thirty-five. They would be allowed to retire from day-to-day administration at age fifty. The strong and courageous would be placed on the warrior track. Warriors would have no private property and eat in common mess halls, like the Spartans. They would not be permitted to enslave other Greeks or to burn their property while at war. The rest of the people would be trained in various trades, according to their differing aptitudes.

All citizens, including females, would begin on the same plane and would be educated to the limit of their ability. Plato argued that men and women "differ only in one thing, that the male begets and the female bears the child." He added: "No practice or calling in the life of the city belongs to woman as woman, or man as man, but the various aptitudes are dispersed among both sexes alike." Indeed, Plato himself had admitted a few women of exceptional ability into his Academy.

The guardians would control all artistic expression, since art appealed to the irrational element in the soul, so as to prevent the spread of immorality. While emotion was not in itself bad, it must be shaped and utilized to promote virtue and not vice. To that end, the gods must be portrayed as honest,

peace-loving, virtuous, and changeless. Children must always be taught that virtue led to happiness, and vice to unhappiness. To make guardians and warriors brave, they must be taught that the afterlife was good. Among musical instruments only the simple lyre and harp would be allowed, among songs and poems only hymns to the gods and praise of the good. Painters, architects, and even furniture makers must be monitored so that their works projected a spirit of beauty and harmony. Plato declared: "To hate what one ought to hate and to love what one ought to love: this is true education."

Plato intended his republic to represent the form of polis. By their very nature, forms could only be approximated in the imperfect world of the senses. Nevertheless, they were essential as models. The role of the statesman, then, was to use the form or ideal of the polis as a painter used his object, as a goal of emulation, though it could never be reproduced completely in the material world. To even approximate his ideal, the statesman, like the painter, must be acutely aware of his materials, including their limitations, and how to use them. Thus, while Plato understood that his ideal republic could not be fully replicated in the world of the senses, he was confident that a wise statesman, blessed with auspicious circumstances, could at least approximate it. Indeed, Plato ended the *Republic* with this significant conclusion concerning the prospects of creating a republic similar to that which he had just described: "Difficult it is indeed, but possible somehow." Plato explained that a polis similar to his republic could be inaugurated by removing children from their parents at an early age, taking them out to the countryside, and training them in the proper way.

At the urging of friends, Plato accepted the invitation of Dionysius I, dictator of Syracuse, to serve as a tutor to his son Dionysius II in 367 B.C. Either because he grew weary of Plato's rebukes concerning the gluttony and sexual promiscuity of the Syracusan court or for political reasons, the dictator sold Plato into slavery. A friend bought the philosopher's freedom, and he returned home.

Plato then composed a series of practical treatises on politics, in the process introducing the influential theory of mixed government. In the *Laws*, a work in which Plato suggested a legal code for a small city to be established in Crete, Plato stated that there were three simple forms of government: monarchy (rule by the one), aristocracy (rule by the few), and democracy (rule by the many). But each of these forms degenerated over time. Monarchy degenerated into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, and democracy into ochlocracy (mob rule). Plato then suggested that perhaps the best government would be a mixed government, one that balanced the power of the one, the few, and the many. Plato's mixed government theory became one of the most significant theories in Western history.

Nevertheless, though the *Laws* departed from the *Republic* in advocating a mixed government rather than an oligarchy of guardians, the *Laws* retained much of the rigidity of the *Republic*. Citizens under forty would

be prohibited from traveling for fear they would be corrupted by foreign luxury. The sole exception would be Olympic athletes, since their exertions would bring glory to their city. No atheism or ritualistic religion would be permitted; religion would be based solely on belief in the gods and in virtue. While those dissidents amenable to learning would be reformed, the adamant would be imprisoned or killed.

Plato's eloquence was so astonishing his prose was often compared with Homer's poetry, which was, indeed, his object of emulation. His graceful and versatile style ranged from lighthearted to solemn, often utilizing poetic allegories to convey otherwise inexpressible profundities. His praise for the moral life ("If it should be necessary for me to either do wrong or be wronged, I would choose for myself to be wronged") earned him a central place in Western philosophy. Plato's pupil Aristotle wrote of him: "He was the only man, or at least the first, who showed, through his words and through his life, how a man can become both good and happy at the same time." Cicero later added that if God ever chose to speak in human words, he would write like Plato. Plato was buried in a garden at his beloved Academy.

PLATO'S OPPONENTS AMONG THE GREEKS

All philosophers who followed Plato were forced to come to grips with his ideas. Some adopted them, some modified them, and some rejected them, but none could ignore them. Indeed, all of the other influential philosophies developed in the effort to refute Plato.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.)

Aristotle, Plato's most brilliant student, moved to Athens from Stagira (in Chalcidice) at the age of seventeen. Aristotle's father had served as physician to Philip II, the king of Macedon. Aristotle taught at the Academy until Plato died and the Academy passed to Plato's nephew Speusippus. (Some historians believe Aristotle left Athens even before Plato's death due to anti-Macedonian sentiment there.) In 335 B.C., Aristotle returned to Athens and opened the Lyceum, a rival school located in the sacred grove of Apollo Lyceius.

Aristotle presented his philosophy in two great works, the *Metaphysics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Edited by his son Nicomachus, the latter work was the first treatise on ethics ever written. Aristotle envisioned the Prime Mover, or first cause, as a perfect, immortal, immutable unity but not one who intervened in natural processes. He argued that all knowledge was learned: "There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses." He denied the existence of intuition and innate goodness, suggesting that

virtue was a product of rational training and habit. Aristotle claimed: "We are not made good or bad by nature."

Aristotle generally defined virtue as the "Golden Mean," the most rational point between behavioral extremes (e.g., the mean between cowardice and rashness, abstinence and indulgence, and self-deprecation and vanity), though he noted that some emotions (like envy) and some actions (like adultery) were always wrong. Sometimes the "mean" was actually closer to one extreme; for instance, the virtue of courage was closer to rashness than to cowardice. Aristotle conceded: "It is no easy task to find the middle. . . . Wherefore, goodness is rare and laudable and noble."

According to Aristotle, virtue did not generally consist in the rigid application of those absolute moral laws for which Socrates and Plato searched, but in a difficult daily struggle to discern the probable effects of one's behavior in a given context. An act that might be moral in one instance might be immoral in another. But, though Aristotle was a contextualist, he was not an extreme relativist: He believed that while ethics varied with context, it was still possible to deduce from experience the appropriate behavior for each particular situation. He would not have agreed with the extreme relativist position that one act was as moral or immoral as another.

Aristotle agreed with Socrates and Plato that the reward for virtue was earthly happiness through self-respect and the respect of others, as surely as the penalty for vice was unhappiness. Aristotle claimed: "Bad men are full of regrets." While Aristotle expressed no opinion on the existence of an afterlife, he clearly viewed earthly happiness as the ultimate prize.

If earthly happiness depended on virtue, and if virtue depended on rational training and habit, as Aristotle contended, it followed that the proper role of both the polis and the friend must be to help the individual in his quest to become virtuous by encouraging him to adopt the appropriate habits. Reflecting centuries of Greek tradition, Aristotle wrote: "Legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them . . . and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one." Since the attainment of virtue was as difficult as it was essential, it could be achieved only through mutual aid. The polis in which one lived and the company that one kept were crucial to one's chances of becoming virtuous and, hence, happy. This logic explains why ancient political theorists focused so much attention on prohibiting immoral behavior. Immorality was like a cancer that would grow until it corrupted all of society, thereby making it almost impossible for the individual to lead a moral life. It was absurd to pretend that individual immorality had no effect on social virtue, or visa versa. No man was an island. Aristotle claimed: "Man is a social animal and one whose nature is to live with others." Society preceded the individual. The polis was a body, each individual a limb. Virtuous friends were "the greatest of external goods" because they helped one achieve virtue. Aristotle wrote: "If a friend becomes wicked, it is necessary to lead him back into goodness. For it is a better and more loving act to aid him in acquiring character than to aid him in acquiring wealth." Friends were bound together by the closest ties. When asked, "What is a friend?" Aristotle replied, "One soul dwelling in two bodies."

Aristotle's *Politics* immortalized Plato's theory of mixed government. In the process of analyzing the governments of 158 poleis, Aristotle cited numerous examples of actual mixed systems in the ancient world. One of the "mixed governments" Aristotle cited was that of Sparta. Yet, Sparta's status as a mixed government is questionable, as the power of the Spartan kings and of the Spartan majority seems to have been too weak to effectively check the power of the council of elders. Indeed, Aristotle himself seemed to have understood this at times, remarking regarding the elders, "The lack of accountability for their acts and the life tenure of their office are greater privileges than they deserve." He added: "The fact that the people who are not participants in the office remain quiet is no proof of the goodness of this practice."

Aristotle's famous elaboration of Plato's mixed government theory contributed greatly to the establishment of a mixed government in the United States under the U.S. Constitution. At the Constitutional Convention, Alexander Hamilton and other Founding Fathers cited Aristotle on the need to establish a mixed government. Thus, the founders balanced the power of the federal government between the one (the president), the representatives of the few (the Senate), and the representatives of the many (the House of Representatives).

Aristotle also became the first political theorist to argue that a large middle class was essential to republican government. He claimed that those who possessed a golden mean of income lacked the arrogance of the rich and the envy of the poor. Furthermore, having "neither so much property that they are able to enjoy a leisure free from all business cares, nor so little that they depend on the city for support," they would "ask that the law should rule for them" rather than constantly overturning the laws. They were "least prone either to refuse office or to seek it, both of which tendencies are dangerous to poleis." But Aristotle made it clear that the middle class he favored was one composed of farmers, not one formed from the merchants and traders, a class Aristotle despised for their obsession with profit.

Unfortunately, Aristotle's *Politics* also included an influential defense of slavery. Aristotle argued that some were born to lead and others to follow: "The element which is able, by virtue of its intelligence, to exercise forethought is naturally a ruling and master element; the element which is able, by virtue of its bodily power, to do the physical work, is a ruled element, which is naturally in a state of slavery." Just as the mind should rule the body, so those with better minds should rule those with better bodies. Aristotle connected slavery with the universal rule of humans over animals, adults over children, and males over females, power relationships he considered equally natural—though he argued that the rule of male over female should be closer to that of a statesman over fellow citizens

than to that of a monarch over his subjects. Slavery was both natural and beneficial to the slave: "Those whose function is to use the body and from whom physical labor is the most that can be expected are by nature slaves, and it is best for them, as it is for all inferior things I have already mentioned, to be ruled." The master was distinguished from his slave not only by his greater intelligence—though Aristotle conceded that in actual practice the slave was sometimes more intelligent than his master—but also by his greater love of liberty. At one point, Aristotle implied that anyone who would allow himself to be enslaved, rather than taking his own life, did not possess the passion for liberty requisite for a citizen in a republic: "For he is by nature a slave who is capable of belonging to another and therefore does belong to another." Aristotle sometimes seemed to suggest, as had Plato, that while it was wrong to enslave fellow Greeks, it was appropriate to enslave "barbarians," who were "natural slaves"—a doctrine useful to Alexander, Aristotle's pupil, in his conquest of the Persian Empire. Slaveholders wielded Aristotle's defense of slavery as a powerful weapon throughout Western history.

Perhaps the most versatile philosopher in human history, Aristotle single-handedly created the Western curriculum, defining its various fields of study. His obsession with, and immense talent for, categorization stemmed from his belief in the divinely ordained order of the universe and its accessibility to human reason. His *Organon* (Instrument or Tool) and his *Rhetoric* became the standard textbooks for the respective studies of logic and oratory for over two millennia. The "Father of Zoology," he analyzed the anatomies, breeding habits, and migrations of 540 animals. He correctly rejected the popular view that acquired characteristics (e.g., large muscles gained through exertion) were inheritable by offspring. He was the first biologist to dissect animals extensively. He wrote concerning mathematics, astronomy, physics, meteorology, geology, chemistry, anatomy, history, and literary criticism. His *Poetics* was the first systematic treatment of aesthetics.

If Aristotle's style is sometimes dry and convoluted, it is partly because most of his surviving works exist in the form of lecture notes. The works that he wrote for the public, his poems and plays, did not survive. His convoluted style also stems from his supreme dedication to truth, which caused him to prefer the inconclusive discussion of problems to artificial conclusions. He always clarified issues while doing justice to their complexity, the scholar's most difficult task.

There was hardly a field of study Aristotle did not influence. One ancient commentator reckoned the number of his works at 400, another at 1,000, though only 47 survive. Medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas called Aristotle "the Philosopher" and "the master of those who know." Indeed, by the Middle Ages Aristotle's influence had become too great, so that the quest for truth, to which he had devoted his entire life, had become impeded by the fanatical manner in which his followers clung to his errors in astronomy

and physics. (He argued that the earth lay at the center of the universe, that motion required a continuous force, and that heavier objects fell faster than lighter ones.) In contrast to some of his followers, Aristotle himself remained ever humble, writing: "While individually we contribute little or nothing to truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed."

In arguing that the material world was less real than the world of the forms, Platonism had emphasized contemplation over observation. In embracing the material world as the ultimate reality, an evolutionary but orderly place whose principles of operation human reason could discover and discern, Aristotle restored the significance of empirical knowledge. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that every man was a follower of either Plato or Aristotle. Both contributed greatly to modern science—Plato to its emphasis on mathematics, and Aristotle to its emphasis on empirical observation.

Stoicism

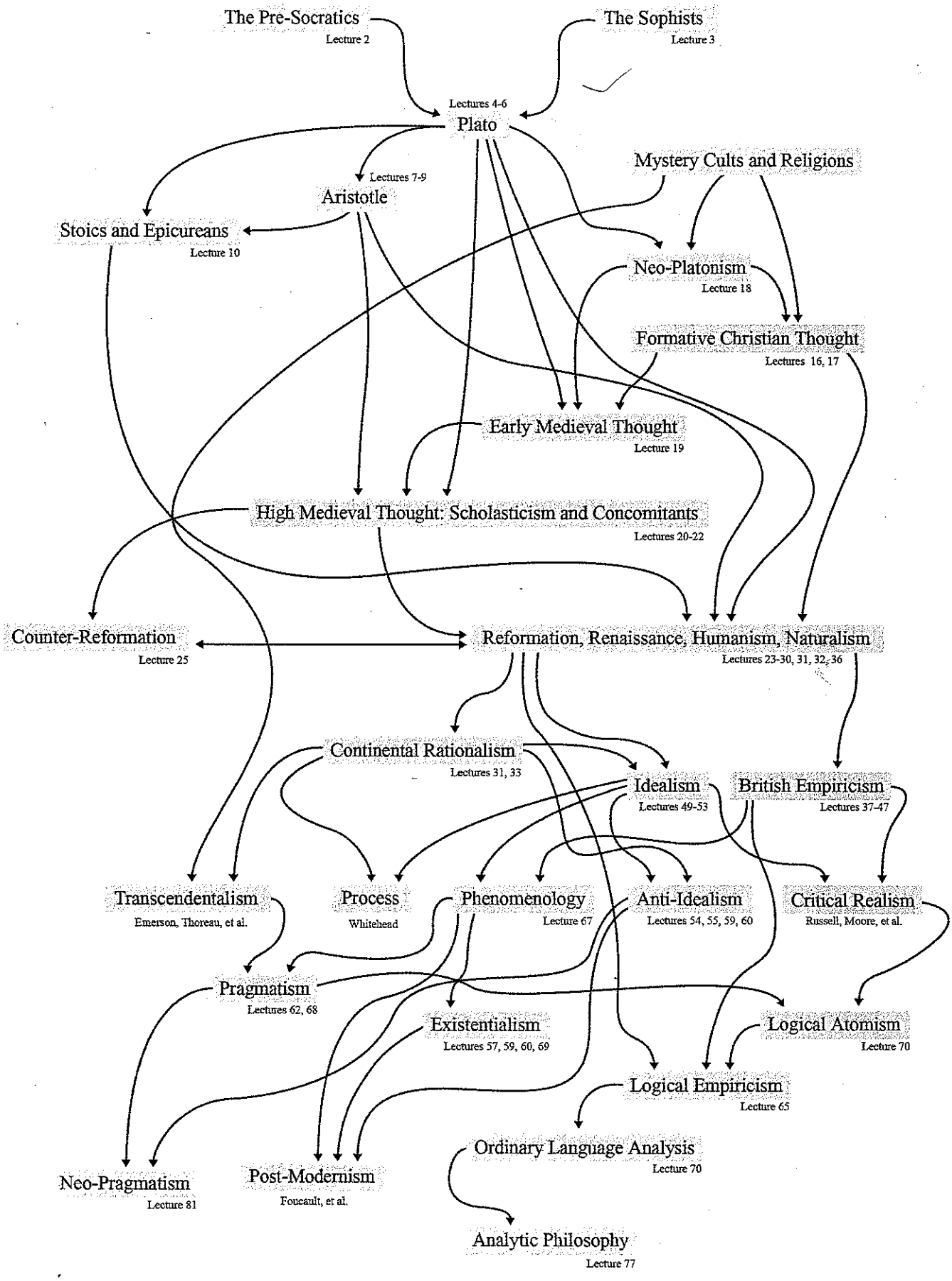
Zeno, a tall, gaunt Phoenician from Citium in Cyprus who had been shipwrecked in Athens while on a trading expedition in 310 B.C., established the philosophy of Stoicism. The Stoics were so named because Zeno lectured at the city's Stoa Poikile (Painted Porch), a public colonnade.

The Stoics believed that all reality was material. But while basic matter was passive, the Logos or World Soul, a finer sort of matter, was the active, animating portion of the universe. Drawing from Plato, Stoics held that human souls were fragments of this common World Soul, a consciousness that diffused itself through space to create and sustain the universe. The World Soul had been called many names over the centuries, including "God," "Fate," and "Zeus." The names of the gods merely represented the World Soul's different attributes. The individual soul, which had an intuitive comprehension of the eternal truths of the World Soul, could be fully reintegrated into the World Soul after death if it had been well cared for in life. The World Soul created and destroyed the universe in an eternal cycle; at intervals, the universe was consumed by fire, and an identical universe was formed in which the same events were repeated.

The Stoics believed in the spiritual equality of all humans. While most contemporary religions and philosophies were hierarchical in nature, the Stoics considered women and slaves spiritually equal to free men.

The Stoics were also fatalists. They believed that the universe was an endless chain of causation, like a river destined to flow in a certain direction. Since it was futile to battle the inexorable current of the universe, the Stoics emphasized the need to endure such hardships as pain, sorrow, and death patiently.

The Stoics believed that earthly happiness was the reward of virtue. An individual who put himself at odds with the natural flow of the universe,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