

How Did We Get Here? Philosophy

Merlin CCC, April 2024

I. The Socratic Synthesis

- Socrates (c. 469–399 BCE)
- Elements of the synthesis:
 1. Pythagoras and his tradition (6th cent. BCE).
 2. Nature (*physis*) and origins/principles (*archē*, plural *archai*) (6th–5th cent. BCE).
 - Thales of Miletus, Heraclitus, Empedocles, *et al.*
 - Parmenides and Zeno of Elea.
 3. The sophists.
 4. Mystery cults and other popular piety.
- A few results:
 - Hellenistic divisions of philosophy: Logic, physics, and ethics (late BCE–early CE).
 - Alexandrian definitions of philosophy (late 6th cent. CE). (*1,100 years after Pythagoras!*)

II. The Scholastic Ediface

- Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).
 - Condemned in 1277, canonized in 1323.
- A narrowing of boundaries:
 - God as *esse ipsum*, “being itself.”
 - The study of substance: form & matter, with “accidents.”

III. The Cartesian Rearguard

- Corpuscularianism.
 - Calling back to Democritus (born c. 460 BCE).
- René Descartes (1596–1650).
 - “Thinking stuff” and “extended stuff” (*res cogitans & res extensa*).
 - Saving space for a properly “metaphysical” domain?
- Legacy of dualism(s).
- An old ambition: An abstract universality, apart from the particulars of history.
 - Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).
 - James Mill (1773–1836).
 - Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).

IV. Unravellings

- Mind and experience.
 - The rise of psychology as a distinct science (both theoretical and practical).
 - Phenomenology.
- Mathematical logic.
 - Gottlob Frege (1848–1925).
- Merely persuasive (rather than demonstrative) ethics.
 - Utilitarianism.
 - Consequentialism.

Six Definitions of Philosophy (*Alexandria, Egypt, late 6th century CE*)

From the subject-matter:

1. Philosophy is knowledge of real beings *qua* real beings. (Pythagoras)
2. Philosophy is knowledge of divine and human things. (Pythagoras)

From the goal:

3. Philosophy is a preparation for death. (Plato, *Phaedo*)
4. Philosophy is becoming like God, insofar as possible for Man. (Plato, *Thaetetus*)

From superiority:

5. Philosophy is the craft of crafts and the science of sciences. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*)

From etymology:

6. Philosophy is the love of wisdom. (Pythagoras)