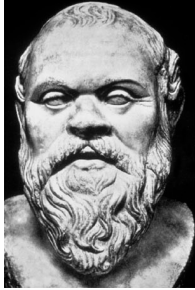


FROM SOCRATES TO SARTRE – A SYNOPSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

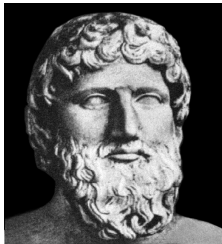
Socrates, 469-399 BC



This great philosopher of ancient Athens is generally regarded as one of the wisest people who ever lived. Socrates left no personal writings and we have scant idea about any of his teachers. Most knowledge about him is derived through the writings and teachings of his most famous pupil, Plato. In seeking the truth this great thinker employed a rigorous system of question and answer, a method now known as the Socratic Dialogue.

“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.” – Socrates

Plato, circa 428/427-347 BC



Plato’s real name was Aristocles. Also an Athenian, he’s considered one of the most famous, respected and influential philosophers, as well as the most wide ranging and influential author on the history of philosophy. Plato’s famous dialogue the *Symposium* gave rise to the term Platonic love, meaning non-sexual love.

Plato’s writings are our main source of information about the teachings of his fellow philosopher Socrates. Plato thought the human soul contained reason, spirit and appetite. The questions he raised, and the methods he used for grappling with them, were so profound and provocative that his influence has been felt for centuries.

“And what, Socrates, is the food of the soul? Surely, I said, knowledge is the food of the soul.” - Plato’s Protagoras

Niccolo Machiavelli, 1469-1527

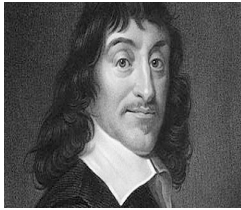


A political philosopher and diplomat of Italy during the Renaissance, Machiavelli is most famous for his political treatise *The Prince*, which has since become a cornerstone of modern political philosophy. He pushed for policies that discouraged mass political activism and channelled people to pursue their private lives. He tried to persuade the monarch to preserve his power through the use of violence.

Partly due to the misinterpretation of his pragmatic view of the relationship between ethics and politics, the meaning of the word “Machiavellian” is used to describe politicians and people who manipulate others in an opportunistic and deceptive way.

“It is double pleasure to deceive the deceiver.” - Machiavelli

Rene Descartes, 1596-1650



This influential French philosopher is perhaps most famous for his dictum: "I think; therefore I am." He is sometimes called the founder of modern philosophy. In 1641, Descartes published his major philosophical work *A Discourse on Method Meditations on First Philosophy*.

This was in the year before Galileo died and Isaac Newton was born, a time when traditional ideas were being questioned. Descartes' approach towards finding the truth through a method of systemic doubt had enormous impact on the future development of philosophy.

"Except our own thoughts, there is nothing absolutely in our power." - Descartes

David Hume, 1711-1776

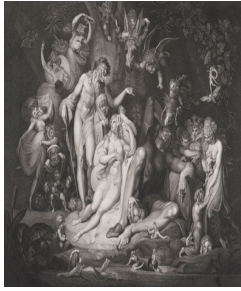


A Scottish philosopher, historian, economist and essayist, Hume is particularly well known for his philosophical empiricism and scepticism. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) he strives to create a total naturalistic "science of man" examining the psychological basis of human nature. He argued with Descartes' views, concluding that desire rather than reason governed human behaviour.

He also argued against the existence of innate ideas, instead believing that humans have knowledge only of the things they directly experience. Hume held that humans have no actual conception of self, only a bundle of sensations associated with the self. He advocated a compatibilist theory of free will that proved extremely influential on subsequent moral philosophy.

"Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." - from Hume's *Treatise*

Romanticism, circa 1770-1870



Romanticism has little to do with things popularly thought of as "romantic" (although love may occasionally be the subject of Romantic art). It refers to an international artistic and philosophical movement that redefined the fundamental ways in which people in Western cultures thought about themselves and about their world.

Romanticism was, in part, a revolt against aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and a reaction against the scientific rationalisation of nature. Symbolism and myth were given great prominence, being valued because they could simultaneously suggest many things, legitimising the individuals' imagination as a critical authority permitting freedom of thought.

"To say the word Romanticism is to say modern art - that is, intimacy, spirituality, colour, aspiration towards the infinite, expressed by every means available to the arts." - Charles Baudelaire

Jean Paul Sartre 1905-1980



French existential philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer and literary critic. Sartre was one of the leading figures in 20th Century French philosophical existentialism following World War 11. At the heart of his philosophy is a deep yearning for freedom and an associated sense of responsibility.

Whilst one is never free of their situation, Sartre felt "in the end one is always responsible for what is made of one". The phrase 'Existence precedes essence' means that what we do, how we act in our life, will determine our apparent qualities.

In 1975, when asked how he would like to be remembered, Sartre replied: "I would like [people] to remember *Nausea*, [my plays] *No Exit* and *The Devil and the Good Lord*, and then my two philosophical works, more particularly the second one, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* ... if these are remembered that would be quite an achievement and I don't ask for more. As a man, if a certain Jean-Paul Sartre is remembered, I would like people to remember the milieu or historical situation in which I lived ... how I lived in it, in terms of all the aspirations which I tried to gather up within myself."