

*Cogito ergo sum.*¹

Classical Thought

Introduction to Greek Philosophy²



You will notice that each day's lesson is headed with a short Latin quotation. At first you will not be able to translate these yourself but gradually over time you will begin to recognise words and constructions. There are many wise words that were first spoken in Latin but there is more to Classical thought than just a collection of useful mottos. The ancient Greeks and Romans were great thinkers and they were determined that they *would* think. Some of them thought about very deep issues and had some interesting insights. However, you will notice as we go through their ideas that, lacking the truth of the gospel, they came to bizarre and contradictory conclusions.

What does the word Philosophy mean?

Philo (means love) + sophy (means wisdom) = the love of wisdom.

The Bible tells us in Col. 2:3 that “in whom [Christ] are hid **all** the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” This means that only Christians can do philosophy correctly.

Philosophy aims to answer the basic questions of life.

How do we know what we know? (The technical term for this is epistemology.)

How should we live our lives? (The technical term for this is ethics.)

How can we reason correctly? (The technical term for this is logic.)

What is the nature, structure and origin of reality? (The technical term for this is metaphysics.)

Everyone does philosophy whether they do it well or not, and whether they realise it or not. Everyone has principles by which they live. Someone may say, “I’m not interested in philosophy, I just do my best,” but that *is* a philosophy! To say, “I just do my best” presupposes that you know what is good (ethics) and that you know that striving to do it is right. Or someone else might say, “I know when something is real or not – if you can touch it it's real! I don't need to have a philosophy to understand that!” Again this *is* a philosophy. It answers metaphysical questions with the idea that only what we can perceive with our senses is real. This idea is called empiricism.

You will read that the ancient Greeks were the first people to do philosophy but you will realise that if everyone does philosophy then philosophy actually began with Adam. In fact, all the ancient

¹ I think therefore I am.

² Most of the ideas in these lessons come straight from *The History of Western Philosophy 3 Courses Taught at Christ College* by Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen. These are available from Covenant Media Foundation <https://www.cmfnow.com/>. As far as I am aware they are the best (if not the only) rigorous treatment of the whole of the history of philosophy from a Christian perspective. Please note that I do not endorse the Theonomist perspective of CMF and the late Dr Bahnsen. This perspective does not, however, materially mar the usefulness of these lectures.

cultures that preceded the Greeks – the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and so on – all had philosophies and they were often highly developed. However, the philosophies of these cultures had a religious basis of one kind or another and answered the questions of epistemology, ethics, logic and metaphysics in religious terms. However, the Greeks were the first to try to work out the answers to philosophical questions without reference to anything religious. This is an impossible task and led them into some tremendous difficulties which have never been solved by atheistic philosophers since.

Draw a line from the philosophical term to the correct definition on the right.

The study of how we know what we know.	ethics
The study of how we should live our lives.	logic
the study of reasoning correctly.	metaphysics
The study of the nature, structure and origin of reality.	epistemology

List the five senses. Think of some difficulties with the argument that we test whether something is real by means of our physical senses.

Thales is often described as the first philosopher. This is not correct – Adam and Eve were the first philosophers. If you have a synchronological chart you will find can see what was going on in the Bible narrative during Thales life time!

Answers are on the next page.

Answers:

The study of how we know what we know is epistemology.

The study of how we should live our lives is ethics.

The study of reasoning correctly is logic.

The study of the nature, structure and origin of reality is metaphysics.

The five senses are touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell.

There are some aspects of reality that cannot be experienced through our sense. For example, everyone would probably agree that love exists but we cannot touch, taste, see, hear or smell it.

What about an idea or a thought? Can it exist even though we do not hear, or see it expressed?