

Introduction to philosophy essay sample

[Philosophy](#)



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Philosophy emerged from myth in 6Bc. Mythology is primly a religious answer concerning divinity & gods. The myths' genre is a literary poetry prose type.

A myth tells us why a thing came about. It is not there to give a historical experience but why did it happen. The myth is a story. Example : the myth of creation as it wants to tell us why there are humans , animals universe etc...

Myth contrasts the historical truth, mythology asks questions about :

* Meaning

* Origin

* Life

* Existence

* Time /Eternity

Homer Hesoid and Vergil — The first one was a poet who tried to answer the question about how the world came about.

The 3 Milesians Philosophers:

Thales of Miletus

Anaximander

Anaximenes

Tried to explain that the world came from water

Thought that the infinite made the universe

Thought that everything came from air /fumes.

Concepts in Philosophy:

Nomos — Which means convention, laws, norms

Phusis — Which means Nature

Anaximander and Anaximenes came up with the distinction between the two.

Logos — Means word & reason

Archiē^{1/2} — Means beginning, the dimenic principal of every start, creative source. Example: God.

Nature — character with you from birth

Nature — Character builds up.

The difference between RHETORIC & PHILOSOPHY

The science of persuasion The science

Example: in politics of reason

This is an issue between Sophists & Plato. The first one was convinced that rhetoric was better than philosophy as it would get them far ahead in life.

What is the basics stuff of the universe and all about reality?

* Thales — The World

* Anaximander — Boundless in the form of tension of opposites. The polarity of life as for everything there is an opposite. Example : LIFE AND DEATH.

* Anaximanes — Air...He is assumed that all are formed by means of air.

All three philosophers are attached to mythology.

* Empedocles — he studied fire , water, air & earth and he was the first one to identify these elements.

FOR EVERY THEORY THERE MUST BE ASSUMPTIONS. ASSUMPTIONS ARE THE BASIC POINT OF DEPARTURE. SOMETIMES THESE CANNOT BE PROVEN.

Example :

THEREFORE — Theory + Assumption = Valid Theory

Heraclitus :

He observed the fact that things and reality change. So we ask what is reality? The most constant thing in the universe is flux / change. Meaning that reality is change and that nothing is the same forever. There is no reality / constant. First he made and emphasize on Diversity than he reported that there is unity in diversity.

Many Forms

is present here :

This is an apparent contradiction. We have unity in diversity ... things change but we still have unity in society, universe etc ...

What Philosophy Is

etymology: philo-sophia

philo

=

love of

sophia

=

wisdom

Philosophy is the critical examination of fundamental concepts and beliefs.

* Thales of Miletus said that basic stuff is water. So one can say that the primary substance in this theory is WATER.

Many philosophers asked a common question, that is they asked ? WHAT is reality. Three of these philosophers are :

1. Xenophan

2. Heraclitus

3. Parmenides

He was interested in :

* Biology

* Evolution

* Fossils

* Criticized mythology

He is known as a “ Trampler of Homer”. Xenophan said that the gods depict who we really are and for him this is absurd.

Xenophan was a pantheist- One who identifies God/s/ with the world.

Spinoza was also a pantheist .

They said that God & the world are organically inseparable (meaning they can never be divided). He means that God/ divine are immanent — meaning same thing. The divine in the world is all eye , thought & ear. He was also an anthropologist.

History

Civilization

Social

Thought Sociobiology culture Natural history

Mental history

* DEITY is the divine & Gods.

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The contrast or relation of humans to the divine & Gods. It is also the attribution of human characteristics to the gods. Xenophan criticized them.

Example:

The Greek Mythology...because the gods are described as super humans but still have human characteristics.

* Polytheism — Believing in more than 1 god.

CONCLUSION — God and world are one and the same thing (Pantheism).

Polytheism — Believing in more than 1 god.

* He said that there is constant flux & instability in being (reality). There is no primary substance which does not undergo change. For him becoming is reality and not being.

* For him change into reality is divine.

* MONISM — says that everything is 1 substance even if everything changes.

The terms of being and becoming

Being

Becoming

Indivisible

Changing progress

Unchanging

Eternal

Static & does not change

* He said that change is an illusion.

* There is only one being — Monism.

* Opposite theory to Heraclitus.

* Being is and cannot not be – The principle of non contradiction. A thing cannot be & and not be at the same time so being is eternal and change is an illusion. This lead to the stability of being.

* He stated that senses are not reliable.

* Logic — a thing that can be true and false at the same time.

The difference between thought and sense :

Thought

Sense

Ideas

Sensory point

Concepts

Intellect

Show that there is change

Therefore the conclusion of Parmenides is that senses must be based on thoughts to be correct. Senses are unreliable as they bring illusion and make us believe that there is change.

The difference between Knowledge and opinion:

- * Knowledge comes from the mind

- * Opinion comes from senses.

From this one can conclude that according to Parmenides things are based on the opinions they are an illusion like change.

{Parmenides (c. 500, Elea): reality is one, eternal, unchanging. From this it follows that the world of appearances is illusory and that the ultimate is non-sensible, reachable only by pure thought and argument (this proved to be a crucial influence upon Plato). Parmenides' student, Zeno, elaborated famous arguments for his teacher's viewpoint.}

Parmenides — the unity of being. ZENO AND MELISSUS defended him and his theory.

Democritus Leucippus

- * They came up with the atomic nature of the world.

- * They said that being is reducible to minute atoms. In this theory human beings were included as everything was atoms ...the universe, reality, nature etc...

* They believed in BECOMING and relayed on there senses not like Parmenides.

They believed in the relativity of truth. This means that there is no objective truth. Objective truth is the REAL truth. Example : the earth has the shape of a sphere.

Sophists said that they should be paid for teaching. Teaching meant that the Sophists passed on to others what they knew but in return expected payment.

According to them one should decide how he should live. It is a subject or morals and values.

They believed in the POWER OF WORDS which is called RHETORIC. They believed in convincing others by the:

1. Power of Speech

2. The art or persuasion. This language was there to change people's ideas. This is why they formed part in the Greek Politics.

PROTAGORAS :

The first sophist and the most famous.

His main conviction was the relative truth to personal judgment.

For the sophists there is no group which is superior to others. So Protagoras said that there must be Equality in society and everybody will have equal rights.

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Every individual strives to preserve/ defend oneself. This is why rhetoric is important. This is called self-preservation.

He also points out the fact that there is a lack of trust in the objective truth.

“ Man is the measure of all things” — Protagoras.

The concept of relativism is present here.

GEORGIAS :

A sophist who is linked to SKEPTICISM. THIS MEANS THAT WE CANNOT KNOW OBJECTIVE TRUTH AS THERE IS NO OBJECTIVE VIEW.

In a sophist discussion there is destruction as they introduce DOUBT in their answers.

Skeptical people, like sophists, never believed that there is truth present in a fact.

The 3 principles of GEORGIAS:

1. He said that nothing exists. So he was a NIHILIST (nothing).
2. He said that we cannot know anything.
3. Even if we knew we could not communicate it.

The only function of language for him is for expressions, through which we put forward our power and express our opinion.

THE NATURAL LAW. Might is right.

Gerogias

theories

lead to :

DEMOCRATIC EQUALITY which also involves discussion

Summary Points on Sophists :

The skepticism and epistemology.

The relativity of truth. So this contrasts Greek philosophy as it is objective.

Sophism brought about the intensification of political life. They defended laws through power, to bring order and a normal society.

With the sophists there is a shift from physis to nomos.

Truth is the product of human effect.

They focus on teaching and will win an argument. The art of persuasion.

They are ENCYCLOPAEDISTS as they have build up and stored evidence and they want to teach but expect payment.

AGNOTICISM is present. This means that the can't know.

Deduction was the method of the sophists. This means that truth is relative and from this they developed a system.

The father of classical philosophy.

Insisted & defended objective truth and philosophy and said that there is truth so he contrasted the Sophists.

He said that the true key to wisdom is by saying that you do not know . They dis now do like the Sophists did.

THE SPIRITUAL METHOD: The principle of self- knowledge... this means “ KNOW THY SELF” , through INTROSPECTION — this means you have o search in your soul and discover yourself. The truth is within one’s soul.

“ The unexamined life is not worth living”

For him knowledge is virtue. If you distinguish between good & evil one can live a good life. Ethical Optimism. Example : Honesty & justice.

THE PRINCIPLE OF INDUCTION : this done by the dialectic method in the form of debate/discussion/dialogue. It also means that one moves from the particular instances to the universal law/definition.

ONE HERE ANALYZES THE PARTICULAR EVENTS

AND THEN GOES TO THE :

UNIVERSAL CONCEPT

Universal Concept: which is forms a definition. Socrates was the 1st to discuss the Universal/ emotional concepts. Example: LOVE.

We then have a system of ethics – Intellectual Ethics / Ethical Optimism

Socrates says that virtue is knowledge/ wisdom.

ELENCHTIC METHOD : “ Elenkos”

This is a gathering of things in the form of a list which leads to the Universal law — INDUCATION METHOD. This gives examples of the things.

Socratic Irony: This is because he professes his ignorance and always looks for the truth. He says so because he wants to learn more & create an argument.

Ethics: This includes three main principles-

1. Moral Philosophy

2. Intellectual Ethics

3. Moral Optimism

Virtue is knowledge. If you have an intellectual awareness one's life is good and actions will be just.

SUMMARY

Pre-Socratics

Identity and change, universe and cosmos

Sophists

Shifted attentions to teaching

Socrates

Focus on humanity

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Plato

Synthesis of Cosmological matters, metaphysics, identity, being and ethical questions. His answer is the THEORY OF IDEAS.

427-347Bc

Was a follower of Socrates and was greatly influenced by him.

Was invited to Sicily by Dionysus 1 and 11. Plato's idea was that the best ruler of a country should also be a philosopher. This is why he was invited by these 2 kings.

HIS DIALOGUES:

Early Dialogue

Here he was under a great influence of Socrates.

He wrote 3 dialogues:

Apology — Describes Socrates trial. He was accused of corruption of young ones which wasn't true.

Crito — Says why Socrates decided to remain faithful to the law

Phaedo — witness Socrates last few words before he is killed and he was defending the immortality of the soul.

Theory of Knowledge : epistemology. Dualism is present in Plato's explanations. He uses Dialectic from induction — This means that he builds a universal theory from experiences, appearances and examples.

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His dialogues guide us from one fact to another and they don't have a specific END.

There is difference between EPISTEMA AND DOKSA. Epistema is the true believe while Doksa is the opinion / common believe.

Sense- perception

Ideas/ Essences

With this sense one only sees the apparent world

The soul goes beyond the apparent world

Appearance do not show the truth but suggest that there is something beneath them

This means one sees the essence & it makes a thing what it is not only by its appearance.

The truth of opinion and we can't base on them

The real truth for Plato and the ultimate kind of knowledge.

He also makes a difference between Sense – perception and Ideas/ essences.

Conclusion:

Appearances are only the truth of opinion and so we can't rely only on our senses. But the mind has the ability to TRANSCEND, meaning reach the world of ideas AND essence and think about what our senses show us.

Plato says that if there is no objective truth one can't be able to teach others. He accuses PROTAGORAS that it is contradiction and so PROTAGORAS has no way out.

Plato also asks questions on morality. Who decides what is good? ... He discusses that with reason one can be able to find an answer. We here find the :

Euthyphro Dilemma : Are the things good because the gods say so? Or are they truly good?

So from the THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE he concludes that:

Sense of perception brings us into contact with appearances and they are subject to change. We depend on our reason to come into contact with the truth of an idea. Thought is beyond our senses.

According to Plato our soul re-existed & it was in the world of forms before it came in this world & was trapped inside a body — “ ANAMNESIS”.

The soul fights to remember what it knew previously but it is discouraged by the body. So knowledge helps the soul.

The world of Appearances :

— An image

-A reflection of the World of Forms/Ideas .

World of Forms/Ideas — the world where souls are and then they come to our world in the body .

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True Knowledge: (episteme)

- 1) Infallible – the senses are infallible but true knowledge isn't.
- 2) Of things that are – world can change but true knowledge is stable / does not change.
- 3) It is what is – contrasting the fact that sense bring about change. For the real truth one must go beyond the appearance and go to the ideas/ forms/ universal facts.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE :

Hhhhhhhhhh

By this image:

1. He criticized the Sophists who taught people be rhetoric which is based on shadows.
2. Criticized the trail of Socrates as he tried to teach not like the Sophists, but by means of reason. He was a true wise man and this is what led him to his death.

The ideal truth for Plato was: The universal as it is the essence so it is superior to the particular reality/ truth.

Plato was also a dualist. An example of this is :

- 1) that man is made of BODY & SOUL.
- 2) Another example is that there are 2 worlds according to Plato:
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— The World of forms AND — The world of Appearances

The difference between Episteme and Doksa :

Episteme

Doksa

The true knowledge

Inferior Knowledge

Knowledge of arche (noesis)

Imagination (ekasia) mental fantasy and has no contact with reality

Based on concepts, theories and hypothesis

What we take for granted

Mathematical Knowledge (dianoia)

Common belief (pistis)

Plato is referred to as a parricide when mentioned with PARMENIDES because he robbed away his status.

Parmenides denied multiplicity so being is one. Plato in the dialogue “Sophist” he destroyed Parmenides’s theory and showed that he was too extreme.

Plato tries to refine the position of Parmenides.

Parmenides is the father of Plato because he introduced reason, even if it was too extreme.

Parmenides looked at reality from an extreme. Heraclitus then went to the other extreme and said that everything changes. So Plato found a solution between the two.

BEING (no change) NOT BEING

RELATIVE BEING (Plato's suggestion)

Plato also makes a difference between Absolute being & Relative Being.

Absolute Being

Relative Being

What Parmenides thought that everything has existence “ Is Being”

The representation and what we see

Only the Gods ideas and forms

People

Objective truth

It is subject to change

Can be destroyed

Objects/ reality in this world :

It is made of appearances and revelations. There is sense- appearance and one has to keep in mind that we are living in an imagery world.

Death — brings liberation of the soul from the body.

What is the good life? — Knowledge is virtue that leads to good action. This is the main theory of Plato's moral philosophy:

1) an idea of life

2) Contemplation of the truth. This means one uses reason before anything else. It is also seen as the noblest activity.

Ideas — universal , essences, ultimate truth

In a dialogue “ Phaedrus” Plato uses a myth which describes the soul as a chariot lead by 2 horses. This myth explains how the soul is trapped into the body from the previous world.

emotions (trying to pull the soul above)

2 horses

passions, basic drives, instincts and these pull the soul downwards.

The rider on the chariot is the one who brings control between the two.

The passions etc... wins so the chariot (soul) falls on earth and is trapped into a body. There are two types of bodies:

1) If the level of contemplation is low the soul will be trapped in an animal.

So this means that it is inferior.

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2) If it has a high level of contemplation it will be trapped in a human body.

By this myth Plato explains the existence of soul in the world of forms. The chariot also determines our kind of life as if we base on our life on passions we will lose our freedom.

The Symposium :

This is Plato's dialogue about love. Here Socrates is spoken about. Plato relates love to beauty and being and truth. These go beyond the tangible world. Socrates here says that Eros (the god of love) was not a real god because he was made from abundance & poverty. Socrates concluded that if one of Eros's parents was poor he could not be a god, as gods lacked nothing. For Socrates Eros is a semi-god (daimon)- which is half human and half god. A philosopher is similar to this.

Being beauty love truth are linked.

Beauty — a beautiful body is not true beauty as it grows older. One must go deeper into the levels of truth and beyond appearances. With intellect you contemplate the form/ ideas of beauty / love/truth and you do not accept what senses show you. AESTHETICS – is the theory of Beauty.

Human Nature (Theory of Man):

Plato is a dualist where human nature is concerned. This is because a human being is made up of a body & soul. These two have different agendas. The SOUL wants to discover the truth while the BODY is based on the senses , passions and instincts. The soul is therefore trapped inside the body.

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Plato also says that Ethics & Politics should work together. There is one vision because in :

a) ETHICS : we ask What is a good life?

b) POLITICS : what is a good state?

This two should have a common answer. For Plato a good life means virtue which is knowledge and the senses only show things which are apparent and they do not go beyond this.

According to Plato the soul is divided in 3 dimensions :

Desire

Spirit

Reason

This involves the basic inclinations for survival, desires, satisfaction, pleasure, avoidance of pain. It is the borderline between the body and soul. This is also the inferior part of the soul.

Enthusiasm, anger, and emotions. It is a higher stage than desire

It is the higher stage. One here finds knowledge and the love for knowledge. It guides the other 2 dimensions to maintain order.

According to Plato one has to have a balanced harmony between these 3 to be happy ????

Plato's Political thought :

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The state is also divided into 3 parts. There is a parallel or Analogy between the state and the soul. What is social in the state must reflect what there is in a soul. This is found in the dialogue “ The republic”

The State

Guardians

Auxiliaries

Working Class

These are the rulers of the state and the ones who have power. They decide what is the common good is

(ruling elite)

The military class and this defend the common good. They enhance order in society and support the guardians.

The manual workers. These produce economy & other basic needs of society. They are specialized in their field.

The reason is based on the ruling element of the soul .

In the dialogue “ the republic” Plato asks :

What is justice?

The real justice is where there is harmony between the 3 classes in society under the guidance of the rulers. One must be obedient towards the rulers.

Common good — opposite to individualism as it is the good to all the members in society . example: peace

Social Stratification : It is nature that tells us which class we are to be found in. it gives us the qualities by which you are going to serve, here we find the principle of specialization. A basic education is given to everybody.

Education — Stimulates us to broaden our horizons, here we have a fixed system of values & education is there to reinforce this. Reason is there to reinforce this system & not to question. Education is there to form a uniform system and late on one that passes to conformity. By education one learns to accept the values of society and reinforce them not go against them.

REASON — GUARDIANS

SPIRIT — AUXILIARIES.

DESIRE — WORKING CLASS.

Each class has one-third of the soul but one can say that they have all 3 but for example desire is more present in the working class.

Totalitarian — a state where the common good is superior to the individual good. Plato believed in this type of state. The guardians are educated and have greater knowledge so they decide what the common good is. If one does not fulfill his work he becomes meaningless to society.

Plato is the 1st to propose activities in education. He assumes that education is perfect.

Is Plato's system paternalistic?

Paternalism is one who imposes a decision on another person. He decides what is the good for the other person without leaving space for the other to decide on his own. Plato thinks that the working class are not capable of deciding what the common good is for them so they need the Guardians, The guardians represent the laws & so he does not mention laws in his dialogue. Later on in another dialogue laws are mentioned.

Role of the arts : (poetry drama and literature)

Arts were part of the culture so Plato discussed this issue. He distinguishes between :

1) GOOD POETRY — this involves narration where one tells his own experiences.

2) BAD POETRY — Imitation. When you assume and take another person's character. IT also involves images. It also involves other people's experiences.

Conception Scheme of Plato's Political Theory :

Role of Education :

1) Conformity

2) Harmony

3) Uniformity

The Guardians :

- 1) Have no propert
- 2) have power
- 3) share wives and children