

# Introduction greece in the 6th century bce,



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## **Introduction**

The ancient Greek philosophers have played a fundamental function in the formulation of, not only the western philosophical tradition, but also modern philosophical thought. Many philosophers and other theorists today admit that ancient Greek philosophy has, for centuries now, shaped the entire western thought (Barnes 5). The ancient Greek philosophers are known to have dissociated themselves from a mythological approach to explaining the events of the universe, and embraced a rather holistic approach based on reason and inquiry (Ancient Greek Philosophy para. 2).

However, according to the article, it is imperative to note that neither reason nor the quest for evidence started with the ancient Greeks, but the pre-Socratic philosophers endeavored to identify a single underlying standard that could be used to explain the whole cosmos, allowing in the process great progress in key areas of geometry, logic, and the sciences. This paper discusses the impact of ancient Greek philosophers' seminal works and ideas on modern thought. The western philosophical tradition commenced in earnest in ancient Greece in the 6th century BCE, with the formation of the first caucus of philosophers going by the name 'pre-Socratics' (Ancient Greek Philosophy para. 4).

Other ancient Greek philosophers that indelibly left a mark, and continues to impact modern thought, include Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Zeno of Citium, Epicurus, Pyrrho of Elis, among others. These, and other ancient philosophers, merited Greece to be referred as the birthplace of Western culture due to the astounding advances and educated guesses made in a

multi-disciplinary context (Knierim 1). Their speculations have productively anticipated findings of the 21st century science.

## **Ancient Philosophers' Contributions to Modern Thought**

The fact that there exist palpable and comprehensible parallels between ancient Greek philosophy and Modern thought is undeniable. However, early Greeks perceived the world in a manner that one would today depict as holistic in that, disciplines such as science, religion, and philosophy were intertwined and coalesced into one worldview (Knierim 1). This is not so today, but still, the ancient Greek philosophers continue to influence modern thought.

Thales (624-546 BC) is one such philosopher, whose proposition about right angles commenced what is today known as deductive science. According to Thales, "...a triangle inscribed in a semicircle has a right angle" (Knierim 3). This observation, though it may seem simple and straightforward, continues to inform mathematicians in the 21st century, especially when it comes to Geometry. Deductive logic is still used in many disciplines to come up with well reasoned and accurate prepositions.

Indeed, it was during Thales' era that the notion on how all forms of substances can be diminished to a few elements was advanced. Another main area where Greek philosophers have greatly influenced modern thought is in religion, especially in the interpretation and meaning of the human soul. The concept of the human soul started with Thales, who firmly believed that any form of matter that moved itself using its own power had a soul (Guthrie 103). Leucippus and Democritus, formulators of the concept of

atoms, believed that the soul is made of very movable spherical atoms. Other ancient philosophers were of the opinion that the soul was made up of gaseous or liquid matter. The weakness of these explanations notwithstanding, the attempts by these ancient philosophers to define the human soul facilitated more contemporary and spiritual explanations to be proposed. Plato, for instance, argued that the soul is superior to the body, not mentioning the fact that it was the most important part of an individual (Barnes 23). The philosopher's perception about the soul had an immense sway on early Christian theologians, and continues to influence Christians in the 21st century.

The philosophical works of Aristotle, undoubtedly one of the most influential philosophers, has had great ramifications in most facets of modern life, including the field of education. It was Aristotle who first coined the concept that knowledge achieved through the senses remains invariably confused and polluted, and that the thoughtful soul that turns away from the events of the world can acquire 'true knowledge.' For the philosopher, "...all forms of education are explicitly or implicitly directed towards a human ideal" (UNESCO 2). Aristotle further went to presuppose that if the objective of man is one of his fundamental concerns, then it is only through education that he can realize himself wholly. Also, the philosopher was of the opinion that individuals possess explicit natural abilities, but it is only through education that they discover the art of becoming truly human. This theory of education, according to analysts, has lost none of its relevance in modern thought (UNESCO 9).

His observations are indeed used to inform educational policy and practice across civilizations to date. According to Long, "...in the modern world, Pythagoras is the foremost famous of early Greek philosophers" (66). His contributions to the discipline of mathematics are today still very much in use in our educational institutions, with other theories arising from his theorem developed to solve issues affecting the modern world. Although the Pythagoras theorem was not discovered by the philosopher, he is credited for proving and popularizing it, especially in the Greek world (Knierim 7). Many millennia has passed by ever since the theory was popularized, but Pythagoras still shines as one of the brightest philosophers of early Greek antiquity, and his theorem is often alluded to as the starting point of mathematics in western culture. Today, this theory is taught in schools across the world.

Again, it is the ancient Greek philosophers who came up with fundamental facets of philosophy, still studied in our educational institutions today. These facets, namely metaphysics, materialism, idealism, epistemology, empiricism, rationalism, ethics, among others, continue to influence modern thought, especially in social and political context (Boeree para. 12). The metaphysical question about what the world is made of still bothers contemporary philosophers though it has its roots in ancient Greek philosophers. In the same vein, it is the same ancient Greek philosophers who formulated such epistemological queries such as the knowledge of true and false, good and evil, real and unreal, among others.

These concepts still inform the direction of contemporary life, especially in social, political, and religious orientations. The concepts are still studied

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today at a university level globally to enhance students' capacity to critically think through complex issues (Barnes 48). Modern atomic theory, which is critically fundamental in the discipline of Physics, draws its origins from two ancient philosophers - Leucippus of Miletus and Democritus of Abdera (Guthrie 57). These philosophers proposed that all matter is made up of minute, inseparable particles, otherwise known as atoms. The philosophy thinkers also held that, not only were atoms too small to be seen, changed, or destroyed, but were also wholly solid, lacking any internal structure and having an immeasurable array of shapes and sizes (Infoplease para. 2). These concepts, though greatly reformulated and corrected, are still very much in use in the 21st century, and as such, it is only plausible to give credit to the ancient Greek philosophers. According to Gadamer & Palmer, "...the Greeks [ancient philosophers] taught us to be at home in the world without making the objects in nature into things, how to be at home in a realm of social practices and institutions, [and] how to reflect on man's way of being in the world" (267).

This statement, therefore, means that the world could have never being the same if the ancient Greek philosophers did not lay the groundwork for providing answers and explanations to complex situations and experiences bedeviling the world. Put another way, the ancient Greek philosophers created a platform through which modern-day objectives and aspirations can be advanced. As such, the ancient Greek philosophers can equally be credited for deciding the conduit of modern civilization in that, major contemporary concepts, knowledge, and viewpoints have been built upon

the knowledge and conceptualizations derived from these wise men (Gadamer & Palmer 268).

## **Conclusion**

It is clearly evident that ancient Greek philosophers have had a great influence on modern thought, not only on the specific disciplines as we know them today, but also on our personal lives. It appears, therefore, that theirs was a period of enlightenment, whereby the philosophers were imparted with knowledge previously unheard of (Barnes 8).

A wide array of civilizations, including the western civilization, owes their origin and nurturance to ancient Greek philosophy, and philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle are still mentioned today in nearly all facets and disciplines of life. The impact of ancient Greek philosophers on modern thought, therefore, is monumental.

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