

Why was ancient greece the first civilization to develop democracy essay sample

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



#1 Why was ancient Greece the first civilization to develop rational philosophy? What features of the Ionian city-states gave rise to philosophy?

Ancient Ionia was situated upon what is now the west coast of Anatolia. It consisted of twelve cities that soon became prosperous centers of commerce ("Ionia"; Hooker). The government was chiefly aristocratic and was not burdened by a monarchy or repressive priesthood (Hooker).

Ionia consisted three valleys formed by three rivers, the Hermus, Caster, and the Maeander ("Ionia"). The outflow and silt of these rivers along with its famously ideal climate caused the district to be the most fertile of the colonies of Asia Minor ("Ionia"). The Colonies themselves became prosperous and founded colonies of their own.

This prosperity encouraged the growth of art and several forms of what has become known as philosophy. In Miletus, in particular, the philosophers sought to discover or describe one primary, material substance as the base for all objects and motion (Hooker "Pre-Socratic"). Some of these philosophers included Thales, who postulated that this substance was water (Hooker; Peterson). Thales was the first known Greek philosopher and was responsible for introducing mathematics and astronomy to Greece (Peterson).

Other important philosophers include Heraclitus, Socrates, and Plato. Plato's greatest legacy was his dualistic metaphysics; he believed that the universe was divide between forms and the material. Forms were perfect conceptions or ideas understandable only by using intellect, while the perceptible world

was an imperfect copy of these forms (" Plato"). In a way these ideas foreshadow the ideas of the rationalists during the Enlightenment.

Plato also spent a great deal of time wrestling with the questions of ethics and government (" Socrates"). Though we know little about Socrates except through his student Plato, he is credited with establishing the beginnings of moral philosophy (ethics) and of philosophy in general with his method of enquiry (" Socrates"). In turn Plato's student, Aristotle, establishes what was called natural philosophy which uses empirical methods to provide evidence for certain beliefs. This is the direct ancestor of all of modern Western Science (Hooker " Greek").

Although the Ionian City-States were short-lived as a political entity, its philosophy and culture continue to be felt even today.

Works Cited

" Ionia." Wikipedia. 18 Jun2005. 18 Jun 2005. < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ionia> >

Hooker, Richard. " Greek Philosophy: Aristotle." Ancient Greece. 6 Jun. 1999. 18 Jun. 2005. < <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GREECE/GREECE.HTM> >

Hooker, Richard. " Pre-Socratic Philosophy." Ancient Greece. 6 Jun. 1999. 18 Jun. 2005. < <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GREECE/GREECE.HTM> >

Peterson, Brian PhD. " Polis Democracy and Rational Philosophy."

Unpublished lecture. Florida: Florida International University 26 May 2005.

" Plato" [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato) 18 Jun. 2005. 18 Jun. 2005.< http://en. wikipedia. org/wiki/Plato>

#2 Why was ancient Greece the first civilization to adopt a democratic government? What features in their geography and history contributed to the rise of democracy?

Greece is geographically separated; each island, plain or valley is isolated from its neighbors by the ocean or impassable mountains. This permitted the people living there to develop small self-governing communities (" Ancient Greece: The Rise of Hellas"). Most became monarchies organized around the *polis* or city as the basis of Greek government; today we call this the city-state (" Ancient Greece: The Rise of Hellas"). The Greek city-states changed over time from monarchy to aristocratic rule (Peterson " Philosophy").

Aristocratic rule eventually led to excesses of power and over-control. Ambitious men eventually came to power as tyrants. The tyrants of Ancient Greece were dictatorial rulers who came to power with the support of the peasants (thetes) and other lower classes (" Ancient Greece: Social and Political Conflict"; Peterson " Democracy"). At the time Athens came under rule by the tyrant Pisistrasus, Solon and other Greek philosophers had begun developing the moral philosophy or ethics and applying it to government (Peterson " Democracy"). Solon introduced certain reforms limiting the powers of the aristocracy such as banning mortgages and debt slavery (Peterson " Philosophy").

The tyranny of Pisistratus was succeeded by the first democracy under Themistocles. Themistocles created a large fleet to defend Athens from the Persians. For the first time the landless poor were given the opportunity to improve economically and those who fought were permitted to vote in the assemblies. This was not initially as successful as might be hoped; Themistocles had to pay the workers who were qualified to show up for the weekly assembly meetings (Peterson "Philosophy").

Thus Athens followed the classic pattern Monarchy-> Oligarchy-> Tyranny/Despotism-> Democracy that appears to be typical of States progressing to democracy worldwide. However, like Rome would later, it eventually fell to Empire (Peterson "Democracy").

Works Cited

"Ancient Greece: The Rise of Hellas." Wikipedia. 18 Jun 2005.

"Ancient Greece: Social and Political Conflict." Wikipedia. 18 Jun 2005.

Peterson, Brian PhD. "Polis Democracy and Rational Philosophy."

Unpublished lecture. Florida: Florida International University 26 May 2005.

Peterson, Brian PhD. "The Rise of Democracy." Unpublished lecture. Florida: Florida International University 26 May 2005.

#3 Discuss the government of Rome under both the Republic and the Empire, Why did the Republic become an Empire? Why did the Empire Fail?

The government of Rome was divided between the Aristocrats, or Patricians, and the common people, called plebeians. The idea that the two classes worked together was a central one to the Roman Republic and was enshrined in the motto “ *Senatus Populusque Romana*” . The motto meant “ The Senate and People of Rome” and was emblazoned on many important buildings and public works as S. P. Q. R.. This split remained in place in form and retained some function during the Empire, though most authority was now vested in the Emperor.

The Senate was in charge of foreign policy and financial policy and for appointing magistrates with *imperium*, or military and civil authority. They were also responsible for declaring emergency powers and appointing a dictator for times of emergency and restoring rule of law when the emergency had passed. The Assemblies of the people were responsible for the legislative and judicial powers, and for appointing the other magistrates of Rome. The two classes did not always work together so smoothly.

Relations were strained so far by actions of the Senate that the plebeians, according to legend, actually left Rome to fend for itself and camped out on a nearby hill until the Senate met their demands. Such contentions and riots eventually led to the creation of a new office, the Tribune. The Tribune was elected from the people and was empowered to veto the actions of the Assemblies, the Senate and the actions of appointed magistrates.

The Consul was one of these magistrates. Two consuls were appointed by the Senate to serve for a year and served as the co-heads of State. The two

consuls would alternate their authority each month, taking turns in having the final word. During the Empire the office of Consul still existed, but was mostly powerless; one Emperor, Caligula, apparently once wished to appoint his horse as Consul. The Emperor collected the powers of dictator and became the sole authority for legislative, executive, and judicial powers though the structure of the Republic never disappeared.

The Roman Republic was fatally wounded by Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar was one of the Consuls and conquered Gaul for Rome, but was forced into a civil war with the Senate and won. He was declared dictator for life and ruled as Emperor in form if not in name. When Julius Caesar was murdered by the Senate, his heir Octavian defeats the Senate and becomes the first Emperor, Augustus Caesar.

Under Augustus Rome knows the Pax Romana and is ruled by the Emperor for 45 years, long enough for the Republic to be lost to memory of the generation that was born and died during his reign. The Empire was born of necessity as well as out of ambition. The institutions of the Republic no longer functioned and were actively causing hardship and could no longer govern effectively resulting in several waves of Civil war ended by Augustus.

The Empire chose its leaders through heredity and through military intervention. Though Augustus was a benevolent Emperor, later Emperors were sometimes terrifying despots and were sometimes mentally ill. The malaise the Senate suffered from seemed to settle into the Empire as well

leading to administrative split of the Empire and the eventual fall of the Western empire and a similar demise of the Eastern as well.

#4 Discuss the rise of Democracy in Europe

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, Europe became a squabbling nest of petty princedoms, most eventually becoming consolidated in powerful monarchies with an aristocratic class that possessed most, if not all power within their countries.

These countries followed the pattern that was seen in Ancient Greece in their progress towards democracy. First the aristocracy gains the majority of power, next a dictator or Strait-gate movement arrives with the support of the people and suppresses (often brutally) the aristocratic class, strengthening the central government at the expense of the aristocracy. This suppression, though harsh, leaves enough of a power and economic vacuum that there is room for a middle class to develop.

The governments that come to power often attempt to reconstruct the morals of its citizens. Typically using mass-repression and political murder to enforce their rule. Despite this the same governments often have a motive to develop the power of the common people of the country and instill some form of pride. So we have the social recreation clubs of Germany and Italy, the committees of France and Communism empowering the middle and working classes. Sometimes this seems like an insignificant amount of power, but later crystallizes the effort in creating a democratic society.

Each of the major powers of Europe experienced this phenomenon. France had Robespierre, the fanatical chairman of the infamous Committee of Public Safety, England had the brief interregnum of Cromwell, Spain experienced the fascist dictatorship of Franco, and Italy that of Mussolini. Germany had the horrifying experience of the Nazi Holocaust under Hitler. Every one of these regimes were succeeded by stable democratic societies. This pattern of Autocratic over-indulgence, dictatorial reaction, followed by democracy seems to be a universal pattern. Examples outside Europe include Russia, and Chile, and there are signs that the same pattern is being followed in Iran and China.