Ancient Greek philosophers

Philosophers, thinkers and scientists

The word 'philosopher' means 'someone who loves wisdom' and is used to mean an ancient Greek thinker, scientist or mathematician. This is because many Greek thinkers were interested in several different subjects rather than just science or just the best way to live.

Learning from others

In the 700s BC, the ancient Greeks began to have more contact with other, older civilisations such as the Egyptians and the Babylonians. These civilisations were very advanced in their knowledge about nature and the world. The Egyptians were very skilled mathematicians and very knowledgeable about the human body and medicine. Babylonian priests were very experienced at observing the sky; they used advanced mathematics to predict the movements of the sun, moon and stars.

Greek philosophers used what they had learned from these older civilisations to help them develop their own ideas, views and knowledge.
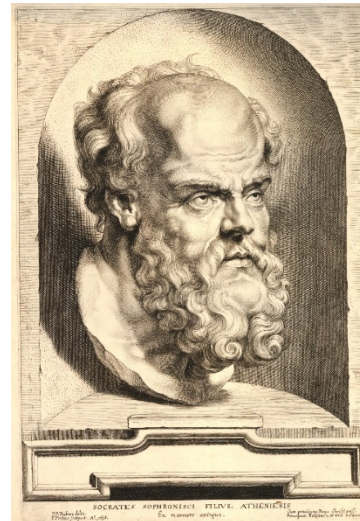
Philosophers and nature

Greek philosophers were interested in trying to understand why the world is the way it is. They had different views about what the world was made of. Thales argued that it was made of water because water can be liquid, solid and a gas and all living things need water to live. Anaximenes proposed that the world was made of different thicknesses of air. Demokritos claimed that the world and everything in it was made of tiny things called atoms, which combined together in different ways.

Philosophers and ways of living

Some Greek philosophers were particularly interested in the best way to lead your life. Antisthenes said that true happiness could only come from being good. Epikouros claimed that humans could increase their well-being by not having wishes they could not satisfy. He also said that the gods had nothing to do with humans, so humans should not seek help from the gods.

Some philosophers thought about the best type of government. Plato believed that a form of knowledge exists that most people do not have. Therefore, a special group of wise men should rule society. Aristotle believed that everyone had the same wish to lead a good life. He said power should be shared, but not by women, workers or foreigners.

This print of Socrates, an Athenian philosopher and teacher, was made 2000 years after his death. Socrates made his pupils think hard about their ideas by asking them lots of questions.

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