

conflicted with law. His ethics lacked religious backing, for he said there were no universal truths. He thought there was a single god in nature, but not one that resembled anything on earth, and not one that Antisthenes regarded with any religious feeling. Cicero later complained that this deprived divinity of all meaning and substance.

Antisthenes admired Heracles for his virtue and valour, and urged his followers to develop stamina as well as virtue. He was a competent wrestler himself, and had distinguished himself by bravery at the battle of Tanagra. But it was his concern with cultivating wisdom and virtue which set him among those who turned philosophy inward to the self rather than outward to the world.

## 15. Plato 427-347 BC

Plato, one of the most influential classical philosophers, wrote in an entertaining, accessible style. Most of his works are cast as dialogues, conversations between his mentor, Socrates, and others. Plato is not a character in these dialogues, so many assume that Socrates expresses Plato's views.

In these discussions, Plato explores the meaning of things like justice and love, and examines what constitutes a balanced life or a just state. Typically, Socrates cross-examines his interlocutors to clarify the essentials of the point at issue, and Plato's philosophy emerges from the collection of such dialogues.

Plato believed that earthly objects are but pale shadows, or representatives, of their ideal, perfect forms, and that the philosopher should try to gain insights to that perfection. He likened our view to prisoners in a cave watching shadows of things cast on a wall by the light of a fire, and only dimly able to appreciate what the reality might be like. By living a just and contemplative life, the philosopher might gain some sense of those perfect forms.

Plato said the soul consists of three elements: the appetitive, which seeks satisfaction of basic desires; the spirited, represented by qualities such as courage; and a third part belonging to the mind, the intellectual side. A balanced mind keeps the three elements within their proper domain, not allowing any to rule unduly.

In his *Republic*, Plato says these three parts of the soul correspond to the three classes in society. There are the rulers, the soldiers and the common people, and they can be likened to the metals gold, silver and bronze in their qualities and worth. A just state, like a just mind, will have each keep to its own appropriate domain. We can secure just rulers, said Plato, by training them to shun worldly temptations.

To apply his ideas, Plato twice sailed from Athens to Syracuse to advise the tyrants Dionysius and Dion on good government, but both trips ended ignominiously. More lastingly, Plato founded the Academy, a school for philosophers. Plato believed in reincarnation, and that people could live many successive lives before achieving the eternal peace and bliss gained by a philosophical life. He said that knowledge was recollected from previous lives rather than learned, and in one dialogue, *Meno*, elicits the memory of geometry from an untutored slave.

In his *Symposium*, Plato puts the case for a love separated from physical fulfilment ('Platonic' love), yet another aspect of the detached philosophical life he advocated.

## ★ 16. Aristotle 384–322 BC

Aristotle and Plato were the most influential philosophers of the ancient world; Aristotle more so because he covered more subjects. His thinking provided the foundation of European intellectual development, together with the systems which dominated thought for two millennia.

He joined Plato's academy at 17 and rapidly became a teacher of rhetoric and dialectic. When Plato died, Aristotle went to Assos and did the research on biology which formed the basis of the science, and thence to Philip's court in Macedonia, where he tutored the young Alexander the Great. Returning to Athens with Alexander's backing, he founded the Lyceum to rival the Academy, teaching more subjects.

It is from lecture notes never intended for publication that his ideas endure. He wrote on physics, metaphysics, biology, logic, meteorology, astronomy, psychology, literary analysis, ethics and politics, often pioneering the whole discipline.

His logical treatises set out universal rules of reasoning, including inductive and deductive inferences and syllogistic reasoning. Aristotle's classic syllogism, still used, is of the form 'All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is mortal.'

In metaphysics, Aristotle explores the fundamental principles of existence. He examines the essence of things, determining that they have 'substance', made up of matter and form; a notion carried through into mediaeval scholasticism. He identifies four causes of everything: the material cause it is made of; the formal cause which is what it is; the efficient cause which is the means of its creation; and the final cause which is its purpose.

Writing on ethics, Aristotle observes that everyone seeks happiness, but having life's necessities is insufficient. Wise people seek true happiness through moderation, for every virtue lies between two extremes of vice, at the 'golden mean'.