

## ANCIENT GREECE

### Background Information 15: Philosophers

The following information sheet gives a brief description of a few of the most famous ancient Greek philosophers.

#### Pythagoras

Operated a kind of religious cult.

One of the first to come up with the idea that mathematical order pervades the physical world.

Introduced the idea of a square and cube of a number – thus applied geometrical concepts to arithmetic.

#### Socrates (b. 470 d. 399)

Quite ugly.

Didn't think he knew all the answers to the questions – but thought no one else did either. He would take a concept and ask what it meant:

eg: 'What is friendship' or 'What is courage'.

He would then challenge any person who thought he knew the answer through constant questioning.

Some certainties come through in Socrates's questioning:

1. No real harm can come to someone who preserves his integrity. Real personal catastrophe comes from the corruption of the soul.
2. No one ever really knowingly does harm, because if you truly understand something is wrong in its fullest sense you wouldn't do it. Therefore he equates virtue with knowledge.

He was arrested and sentenced to death for corrupting the youth.

## Plato (c. 427-347BC )

He's the first Western philosopher whose written works remain intact.

He was a student of Socrates.

He regarded maths and physics as the keys to understanding the natural world.

### Works (not exhaustive!!):

- In the **Republic** he explores the nature of justice, and tries to make a blueprint for the ideal state.

- **Symposium** is an investigation into the nature of love.

He established the prototype of the college – the Academy. The word comes from the name of Plato's house.

His main theory was the Theory of Forms or Ideas. He regarded everything in the world as a decaying copy of something whose ideal form has a permanent and indestructible existence outside space and time.

Describes his theory using The Myth of the Cave.

## Aristotle: (b. 384BC d. 322BC)

He was the founder of an approach to philosophy that starts from observation and experience, prior to abstract thinking.

The most gifted of Plato's pupils and was the tutor of Alexander the Great.

355BC – founds his own school – the Lyceum.

He systemized logic – ie: he sorted out which forms of inference were valid or invalid.

He had a wide range of interests: logic, physics, political science, economics, psychology, and so on.

For Aristotle, 'form' is that which causes something to be the way it is. The real point of everything is what it does.

In **Ethics** – he sets out that true happiness comes from leading a balanced life, moderation in all things... The purpose of the State is to make possible the development and happiness of the individual. Being a member of society is the only way to achieve true happiness.