

What is Philosophy?

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In this paper, I build up the background knowledge of how I view history of philosophy and how it changes from the ancient world up today. What people think of as philosophy today, is not what people thought of as philosophy in the ancient world, but there is a continuous tradition that has changed multiple times due to external influence and kind of cornered itself away from all the disciplines that previously was considered part of philosophy. Modern people tend to view the history of philosophy through the lens of a modern perspective on philosophy. However, this has actually less in common with ancient philosophy than people think, despite that there is indeed a continuous tradition of thought from the biased perspective that modern people have. This background knowledge is going to be important for future papers where I go back to more ancient ideas and how they were originally understood, instead of building upon the theoretical tradition of modern mathematics, where things gets harder to understand than necessary. The goal is to help people understand their own history better, while grasping recent ideas in modern mathematics.

In the mathematical community today, some people are obsessed with the irrational number π , which describes the ratio between the circumference of a circle to its diameter. This obsession with this number has a long history that goes back to the ancient world. Yet, it is one of the few traditions that survived, among a large number of cultural obsessions, most which were lost in time.

Theoretically, from a perspective of Avatar Extensions, one can argue that it is not π (pi) that is the most important number, but τ (tau). Tau is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its radius. So, $\tau = 2\pi$. The π people are obsessed about is due to arbitrary cultural influence and historical coincidences, that put the focus in the mathematical community on the “wrong” number.

Understanding how such cultural traditions appeared and why they went extinct, is important when studying how people use symbols. This goes back to a very simple question: What is philosophy?

When asking this question, it is important to acknowledge that the meaning of the word “philosophy” has changed over time. It is not a static idea invented once and remained that way forever. People had their own perspectives of what they thought philosophy was, in ways that might seem surprising, sometimes shocking, but also very influential in ways that are hard to understand.

Through history, people who put their ideas out there in the world often wanted to be seen as philosophers. Now, the problem is that their concept of philosophy is not necessarily the same as how mainstream philosophy was practiced. Mainstream philosophy is generally not accessible historically, even from our perspective where scholars tend to think they know what it is. The more evidence is brought up in science, scholars start doubting whether our way of looking at history is the correct one. It is common that some scholars discover new ways of thinking about this topic and write books about their views. However, it is easy to still operate inside a very modern approach and mindset. Viewing philosophy historically, as how it was practiced, is very difficult.

When starting to piece together this enormous puzzle, a picture emerges which is very different from most textbooks tell today. A lot of the things that shape our culture has to do with philosophy in ways that can get uncomfortable to sensitive minds. This happens because how people perceive the world, changes over time. What peaks curiosity for people living in the ancient world, does not always overlap with the kind of things people find interesting in modern times.

Keep in mind that people today do not “own” the ideas of people living in the ancient world.

Similarly, people in the ancient world are not responsible for how their ideas influenced our way of thinking, in ways that can be destructive to our modern mindset when these things resurface again.

Just take a simple thing like the number π . One would think that at some point, people would pay more attention to τ , because it is more aesthetically “correct” to give τ more attention. However, this has not happened. The cultural momentum behind π is too large for any single person to change the whole tradition. It is a self fulfilling prophecy: Because people are paying attention to a specific number, new people also pay attention to the same number thinking that there must be a reason why this number is important and they come up with arguments to show and convince other people why this is the case. Instead of arguing in favor of other numbers and perspectives.

This means, when answering what philosophy is throughout history, it is impossible to ignore the cultural momentum. The things that people are obsessed by and see as philosophy, is generally not the same things that modern people think of as philosophy today. From our perspective, it might seem obvious that this is not what philosophy is. Yes. From our perspective, it is not. You will see.

How people think of philosophy today fits in a modern context of collective human knowledge. The problem? This is simply not what people thought of as philosophy historically. It means, one should accept people’s perspectives on philosophy on their own, without judging how much one personally agrees with it. This can be difficult when emotionally, these perspectives undermine our own mindset. Many things that people today take for granted, are not historically accurate. When studying history this way, it might feel like taking apart the things people love with our mindset and making these ideas feel incomplete.

The real history of philosophy is often more shocking and unsatisfying than the simplistic views that modern humans impose and demand. The issue is that when demanding too much from history, this also prevents us from learning about our own past. You have a choice: Either you give up your attachment to the past and let it go, or you get stuck inside your own mental constructs about it.

There is one sentence I believe summarizes what is wrong with our lens:

Religion was primarily related to practices of medicine.

Now, this might not seem like to have anything to do with philosophy. It can look uninteresting and irrelevant. However, this is the major issue that causes people today to view the history of philosophy in a biased perspective shaped by a modern mindset. You have to break down what happened in history to this core insight, over and over, to really get what is going on.

For example, what people are taught today is that there is a break between what people call “natural philosophers” and “social philosophers” in Ancient Greece. This is wrong.

Why is it wrong? The division that people constructed between “natural philosophy” and “social philosophy”, is the result of reading the dialogues in Plato, where Socrates walks around asking people questions. In reality, Socrates probably did not walk around having philosophical debates this way. Plato wrote these texts to train new students thinking about what philosophy is. With other words, these stories is a stage that Plato constructs mentally, a scene where he can perform his own thought experiments. When people read these stories as evidence of a change in how philosophy was practiced, they completely misunderstand how these stories were used.

Plato does not write about actual historical events. This is just not how people write philosophical texts in the ancient world. None of the stories that Plato writes can be taken as historical, nor any stories that continues in the later philosophical tradition.

Why not? These stories seem to have some historical content. Why would they not write about historical events? The reason is that students are there to study medicine.

Here, it might seem as a conceptual gap, that students who study medicine, shows that Plato could not have written about historical events. However, you are not reading stories about how philosophy is practiced. What you are reading about, is introductory texts to the ideas of philosophy. It is like, taking the first course in a multi-year education and think you have nailed down what the field is about. This is very far from the actual reality of how philosophy was practiced at the time.

The first rule when ancient people teach medicine: You do not give it away to everyone. The secrets of medicine knowledge are well kept in close social circles, where people could control access. It is a gatekeeping mechanism, carefully crafted to ensure the wealth and prosperity of a particular group of people. Everyone wants to steal their knowledge if they could, because scammers could mask themselves as professional practitioners of medicine to ignorant victims.

The mechanism of protecting medicine knowledge is the mystery cult. This consists of a priesthood that initiates people into the secrets of a divine mystery, which was the requirement to be accepted as students in schools of medicine. The initiation ritual is used to mark the transition into adulthood. With other words, you were not considered a grown up until you passed the initiation ritual, before you were sworn into protecting the secrets of medicine for that particular cult.

This means, the stories about Socrates are texts that people learn before they get initiated. It is for children. They can prepare for their training in philosophy, by listening to and memorizing these stories. So, it is not how adults practiced philosophy. This is what they taught their children.

When people confuse stories design for children as the historical events of how philosophers lived, you get a conceptual gap between “natural philosophy” and “social philosophy”, because what you believe is “social philosophy” is just a pre-school text before children’s minds are capable of the abstract thought necessary to advance to levels where they also can keep secrets of medicine. Do you see how problematic it is to assume that you know how Socrates lived from these texts?

Here is when people with a modern mindset start to get uncomfortable. Because, if what they understand as philosophy today is just introductory texts from the ancient world, then they also risk that everything they thought about philosophy as a whole is wrong.

Now, do scholars know how Socrates lived? No. The texts that survived were introductory texts.

To answer how, one has to piece together evidence from Plato, Aristotle and the library of Alexandria. A very different perspective of philosophy emerges from this evidence.

You might think you know what a philosopher is, but the real situation is that you do not know. I do not know either. The little that I know is what I get from piecing together evidence from multiple sources. From this evidence, I can confirm that philosophy is not what I thought it was.

What I believe is happening, is what people call “social philosophy” is more or less a continued tradition of “natural philosophy” and there is not much of a breaking away from it. Instead, one can think about it as increasing levels of sophistication that gets more and more involved with religion and politics over time. Yet, the key insight is that all of this activity is evolving around medicine.

Mystery cults are in many ways the barrier that prevents people today from learning about the practice of philosophy in the ancient world. It is a cultural barrier. A mystery cult is something one has to grow up with to understand properly. From the outside, this barrier of knowledge might not

make sense, because modern humans are used to people sharing their knowledge. However, in the ancient world, knowledge is a garden that is protected from intruders. You are not supposed to be in that garden when you are not welcome there. In that sense, knowledge is a forbidden fruit. It is not forbidden in a general sense, like for all people, but it is forbidden for outsiders. The insiders do get to eating from this tree without fear. The outsiders are told that everything that is wrong in the world is their own mistakes, for being curious and try to eat from the forbidden fruit of knowledge.

If this sounds like the Garden of Eden, then it is because this story was likely written in the library of Alexandria, by philosophers. This was one of the ways philosophy was practiced. Like the stories of Socrates, this is another introductory text. It is designed for children.

When you fall off this track of arguments, remember to keep going back to this sentence:

Religion was primarily related to practices of medicine.

Everything people today think of as religion, was focused toward indoctrinating children. This is not how adults practiced religion. Most of the texts that adults used were lost. You read the texts that survived, but those texts were not the real deal, but just introductory texts. All people got was one book today, but the truth was a whole library.

This sentence has to be revisited over and over, until you really get what is going on. It is uncomfortable for our modern mindset, but this is just how people practiced philosophy. Your idea of philosophy is not the same as how these people viewed philosophy.

We do not get to “own” philosophy, in the sense that you can decide what these people did and how they influenced how modern humans view history of philosophy. Similarly, these people are not responsible for our wrong ideas. Philosophy today does not mean the same as their philosophy.

Basically, philosophy was going through extensive training to learn a diverse set of topics, but most importantly, students were trained in the secret knowledge of medicine. This secret knowledge was safeguarded by initiation rituals into mystery cults. What we in our modern mindset consider as religion at the time, is based on introductory texts that advertised for various mystery initiations.

This means, what we consider religion, was not separated from philosophy. It is made up of fairy tales that people tell to children, to get them interested in learning medicine.

Making up stories with religious content, was not something philosophers did to mislead people. They did not think about these stories this way. It is just a natural way of doing advertisement for their schools. It is not their mistake that these stories they advertised is how you think of as religion.

Many people today have invested their entire careers into what they think of as religion and philosophy, but the truth is that these things were not how we think of them. The difference is so huge in cultural gap that people today struggle to bridge this gap mentally. It simply does not “compute” from their perspective, using a modern mindset to view history of philosophy.

This is not caused by people who lived in the ancient world. By historical accidents and coincidences, modern humans ended up viewing ancient religion in a particular way that is not reflecting actual reality of that history. What happened is a slow change over centuries, where our lens of history got distorted by new cultural layers, that our mindset struggle to penetrate through.

There is no attempt to steal ideas from philosophy, e.g. about the soul, by Early Christians. Likewise, philosophers did not intentionally mislead people into believing myths and fairy tales.

The whole idea that you can accuse these people of lying to or corrupting others, is just because you feel betrayed in your modern cultural identity. Historically, this cultural identity simply did not exist. It was never there. People just practiced medicine. It was a vital part of their training.

If people did not practice medicine this way, then they would not survive. They lived in constant fear of violent conflicts. It was no option to them. There is a good reason why practice of medicine converges to a similar social dynamics of initiation rituals, before revealing the secrets.

Everybody that practiced medicine in the ancient world, did it more or less the same way. It is not anything peculiar e.g. about the mystery cult of Dionysus, or the mystery cult of Jesus. It is part of the same cultural tapestry, although the savior figures vary between cults.

When you carry on the burden of multiple centuries of Christian dogma, there is no wonder why this idea, that philosophy is very far from what you thought it was, gets uncomfortable. It is completely understandable why people feel this way today. However, we can not change the past. Either we acknowledge what happened and let it go, or we stay imprisoned with our mental chains.

Remember, it is not somebody's fault that this ended up this way. It is just an accident.

You think you know what philosophy is, but that is based on introductory texts. Furthermore, new mystery cults produced new texts that celebrate their own teachers. Just like Plato celebrated Socrates, the followers of Paul celebrated Jesus. Jesus was not walking around in Judea performing miracles, anymore than Socrates walked around debating people in the streets of Athen. Neither was Thomas walking around in India without a skin, like in one version of The Acts of Thomas.

Some stories are more believable as historical events because they have less supernatural elements in them, but they are all functioning in the same way: To attract new students to their schools.

The Acts of Thomas story has also Jesus writing a slave contract, when he sells his twin brother Thomas. Now, this might seem horrifying. However, do not get obsessed by this particular event, because you will miss the forest for the trees. The truth is much more horrifying: Remember this text is used as advertisement for schools, so when people write about slave contracts, it is because they advertise that when joining this school, you will learn to write such contracts, so you can make a stable income by participating in slave trade. This is a slave economy. Early Christians were not hiding in the catacombs waiting for the final days. They were profiting off the slave economy like everyone else and did not think too much about it. If this were the final days, then what you did to others was not that important, since Jesus forgave your sins anyway. This is even more horrifying.

Slavery and persecution in the ancient world is not what you think it is. Everybody complain that their people are persecuted by other people, because everybody fought against everybody and took slaves as part of the war profit. Taking new slaves was one of the major motivations to go to war. What else would feel better than to see your nemesis in chains, after previously captured your brother or sister and exploited them for years? No wonder when big armies invaded, people felt their were punished by their gods and goddesses. Now, you might think that the empire took sides in such conflicts. Nope! The empire would govern over tribes who continued to fight each other and took slaves, some which they sold on the market place. The military made sure that the transactions went through safely, despite people seeing their own family members getting sold and deported. What better way to get more slaves than to stir a little conflict here and there between tribes? It is a safe bet that a lot of unethical things happened behind the scenes of official records.

The temples functioned as national symbols, where gods and goddesses where thought to live as invisible giant-sized human beings. People believed their food was Ambrosia, a kind of divine drug.

Many people believed that deities were previously historical humans who lived on Earth, but who became divinized, eating Ambrosia and gaining immortality. For example, the historian Diodorus of Siculus believed that Zeus, the head deity of the Greek pantheon, was once a mortal who became divinized. Deities were not all-knowing, everywhere-present and very far from omni-benevolent. They were very much like humans in behavior, except they were super-human. The masculine traits were super-masculine. The feminine traits were super-feminine. However, people did not think about gender as binary either. Several deities were androgynous. Some versions of Aphrodite had a penis. Temple prostitution was common, both for men and women.

The emperor Nero killed his own wife, Claudia Octavia, but later regretted it. So, Nero castrated a boy to a eunuch, dressed him into woman's clothing and married him to punish himself for Claudia's death. This tells something disturbing about how people in the ancient world viewed gender: Women was not just a biological gender, but a social status. Men could castrate themselves, often in wild sexual religious rituals, throwing their own genitals into somebody's house to make them provide them with women's clothing. This showed devotion to the deities and was considered holy.

Jesus was also in this game. He advocates that people become eunuchs. Now, eunuchs today are usually associated with asexuality. However, in the ancient world, eunuchs were often associated with bisexuality. This is why scholars are puzzled by Jesus' words today, because it seems that he is advocating a form of religious sexual prostitution. This can be very shocking to modern humans, but it is completely in line with the general understood practice of religion at Jesus' time.

A prophet or prophetess could warn the people or the king about coming events, but they were not hermits living ascetic lives like how many people think today. They used drugs. The drug use was one of the reasons that people listened to them, because they believed altered state of consciousness could reveal secrets from the divine. People thought that when you were on a high trip, you had a connection to the cosmos, the 7 planets who marked the boundaries between the 7 heavens. Each heaven was thought of as a copy of this world and everything functioned in a cosmic harmony. One event might have seemingly no explanation on this world, but could have a mysterious function on some other world. This belief in cosmic harmony was enforced by the training in crafting and playing musical instruments and teaching the harmonious tones to students. Music was an important part of the initiation rituals. Paul himself brags about having been to the third heaven. He was high.

When the temple fell to an invading army, people made up stories of prophets and prophetesses who warned against this beforehand. Historians wrote history this way, to explain to people how something so bad could happen to their own people. Josephus writes about Jesus of Ananias, a miserable character who was captured by the Romans, tortured and released. This Jesus lost his mind and yelled from the walls of Jerusalem "Woe to Jerusalem!". When the Roman army came, Jesus was struck by a ballista and killed on the spot, a large rock furling against the walls with catapult. Josephus writes that right before being hit, Jesus yells a final "And woe to me also!".

In the Gospel of Mark, Yahweh, the head deity in Jerusalem, gets so angry at the death of Jesus that he rips the curtain that separated the most holy room from the second most holy room, on his way out, to abandon Jerusalem to the Roman army. Now, Jerusalem lies open and unprotected. Later versions add earthquakes, seemingly from Yahweh's stamping foot steps, the sky darkens from Yahweh's mood and even the dead rises and walk around. This is how angry Yahweh is. Jesus is used as a character, not to evangelize forgiveness of sins, but to explain how Jerusalem could fall. Later, when Early Christians experiment with various belief systems, somebody thought they were supposed to sin to be saved, while some believed they were not supposed to. It took some time before they figured out this part, until Marcion of Sinope published letters he claimed came from Paul in the mid 2nd century and settles the debate, by explaining that there was a secret plan to save humanity from their sins in the older stories about Moses. People were impressed by that argument.

Marcion of Sinope is a philosopher and merchant, who traded with the Roman army. Marcion single-handedly changed Christianity forever, by canonizing his texts. This prevented competitors from forging new versions... just kidding. His competitors forged new letters of Paul and canonized their own texts, which later became the official bible. Next, their accused Marcion of Sinope for heresy and made him the bad guy in their own version of history. To make this new version more believable, the mother of the emperor Constantine, Helen, travels to Judea and finds both the cross that Jesus died on and the grave he was buried. People still visit this place today. I have been there.

After Constantine took the power over the Roman empire, the Christians use Galen's texts for their own Dogmatic school of medicine and start to prevent new students to their competitors. Translated into religious terminology: This meant that all other theology than the very one used to support the official monopoly on medicine, was forbidden. However, people did not gave up their traditions of practicing medicine so easily. Specially women tried to pass on what they knew to new generations and as punishment, they were burned at the stake, accused of witchcraft. Now, the word "witch" in some languages, like my own, is "heks" (Norwegian), or "hex" (how people would write it in English). This word comes from Hecate, the priesthood that Medea served in. She was the Queen of Babylon, the woman who rides on the beast with 7 heads in the text of Revelation holding a drink of porneia. That cup is the precursor of the eucharist, the cup that Jesus tells his disciples to drink from in his last meal. So, when people accused a woman of being a witch, this meant somebody who followed Medea as their Christ. Medea is a much older savior figure than both Moses and Jesus.

Medea was believed to have been the granddaughter of Helios, the sun god. She belonged to a tribe of pirates, who sacrificed people they found on the shore to their deities. Think about a ship of traders venturing into the dangerous territory of pirates in the Black Sea. Their ship gets taken over or sunk, and later, the pirates search along the shores for survivors. Because if you get away from the death of drowning, then an even worse faith is waiting. Circe, Medea's niece, figures out that since these poor people are gonna die anyway, she can learn a great deal about medicine from them. Now, without going into details, because we do not have much evidence to go on, still I can imagine that this way of dying was not the best way people could imagine at the time. However, Medea uses the knowledge of medicine she learned from her family and produces a drink so potent that when she disguises herself and offers it to people in a city, the whole city become ecstatic and enter a religious euphoria, upon event, the civilization itself gets born. Medea is their savior and starts a mystery cult.

Now, it is hard to trace back when mystery religions started. Some of the rituals involved seem to come from Egypt. People tell different stories of how it all began. It is common for all mystery religions to have their own spin on it, that explains how their particular version is better than the next one. Frequently, when a neighboring cult adds a new thing to their dogma, people add something to their own beliefs in return. They mimic each other, not by reusing the same ideas, because they could be accused of plagiarizing, but as a response to what others did.

People also engage in theological writings where they bring up texts from other sects than their own and explains to their audience how this is really just their own version but disguised behind a mask. They "know" that they are the ones who know the truth. This means, people are not hostile toward other people's beliefs, at least not at first. When money and property get involved, that is when the hostility starts. Early Christians also adopt names from other religions as labels on themselves, such as the Set deity in the Egyptian pantheon. This shows a cultural level of knowledge and insight into how people think about them in society, that suggests Early Christians were more concerned about fitting in, than to stay fixed in their dogmas.

The most plausible explanation why people are so flexible in their religious beliefs, is because religion in general is primarily about practices of medicine. It gives a better scientific picture.

When people practice medicine, they are making decisions about life and death. Naturally, this means that other concerns, such as saving a patient, is more important than exactly what people believe in. It is modern humans who struggle with this blend of religion and medicine, not people who lived in the ancient world. The way modern humans think about religion today, comes from centuries of persecution against anyone that threatened the official monopoly on medicine. This language or way of thinking, punishes people harshly for deviating, just a tiny change, in doctrine.

How people thought in the ancient world is so radically different from modern religion, that it is almost impossible to bridge the language gap. Just in Early Christianity, there is much more diversity, among fewer people, than the tens of thousands different versions of Christianity today.

Some people believed that Jesus swapped place with Simon of Cyrene when he carried his cross and stood laughing at Simon while he got crucified in Jesus' place. Some people believed Jesus was a giant angel several kilometers tall and had a twin sister Sophia, who was equally tall. This diversity is simply mind blowing and very entertaining. We have many texts from Early Christianity, but almost none of it reflects what people later called Orthodoxy. It is so different than scholars first suggested that the texts found in Nag Hammadi were actually texts who were condemned as heresy. Later on, that argument seems much less convincing.

So, this idea that Early Christians were hiding from authorities in the catacombs, is misleading. Yes, it is true that some Early Christians were persecuted. However, this might not have anything to do with their particular beliefs. You see, the authorities did not like mystery cults in general, because they were breeding ground for rebellions. So, the authorities forbade secret societies, unless they did charity. Now, this puts charity in a new light: Early Christians advocated charity, perhaps not out of good will, but because it was necessary to keep avoiding the spotlight. Also, they visited prisoners, which was a good way to collect dirt on political figures, because some people ended up in prison when they fell out of favor of the emperor. Women were used to avoid suspicion. Powerful women were often running spy networks and commanding slaves. In the stories Early Christians wrote, the patroness faints easily, but in reality this was likely a very tough woman that knew how to give orders. If you messed with these women, then you might end without a head.

When a patroness faints at the sight of blood or Jesus says people should pay taxes in their texts, is not a sign of meakness. The reason people mention these things explicitly, is precisely because they are not doing this in reality. These parts of the stories are kind of like insurance, that when the authorities go through their stuff in search of a crime, they will find "evidence" that supports the opposite. So, when Jesus says people should pay taxes, it is most likely because people do not. This text makes it easier for people to hide away their fortunes and incomes. Popes have done a lot of things through history, even given birth in the middle of the parade (it was a woman disguised as a man), but being poor is not one of them. Early Christians did not like paying taxes. It is normal.

The reason I bring up Christianity so much, is because modern people are so accustomed to thinking about people living in the ancient world as distinguishing religion from philosophy. My point is precisely that although Early Christians are not what we consider mainstream philosophy at the time, they are still very engaged in philosophical debates and consider themselves as philosophers. The word "philosopher" means somebody who is trained intellectually. When somebody calls themselves a philosopher at the time, this meant they were not nobody, but they had the guts to call themselves a such title without being ashamed of it in public. That probably meant they were familiar with libraries, accounting, slave trade, geography, history, tactics of war, geometry, often spoke and wrote multiple languages and not the least: Medicine.

A philosopher is somebody that demands respect in public. Even if you come from a small cult in some backwater region of the empire, then the title of philosopher still carried weight.

When people fight over theological points in their texts, it is not because they see these points as vital for their own religious beliefs. Think about it more like an academic argument. They are writing treaties on some topic and try to think stuff through by writing. When people later see these texts as holy, it is because they lack the academic training to recognize this way of debating. That same person who argued heatedly for position A in some text, might also have written another text where some position B conflicts with A. Academic treaties do not have to be logical consistent, only locally coherent. A person can change their views multiple times during their lives.

This is why modern religion is so different and would be very alien to how people in the ancient world thought. Just the idea that you had a text which could not be edited, is simply unthinkable. Ancient people did not think of their texts as static, despite that they would write warnings against editing the texts. This is to protect themselves from forgeries, not to prevent themselves from changing their minds. The Dead Sea Scrolls shows that people were modifying and editing texts, most likely because they tried to make the stories more coherent and flow better, comparing different versions in different languages. Christians like to point out some section that matches word for word with some later copy, but they are usually less eager to show all the parts that differ. When a text does not change much, this is a sign that many people have a copy and are very familiar with the composition to easily detect changes. When a text changes frequently, it is a sign of being written recently and modified to fit new purposes.

Philosophers did not see themselves as fixed to a specific set of doctrines. The entire purpose of philosophy was to change their minds with convincing arguments, divine revelation from use of drugs and observations of the natural world. This is how they produced so many myths, from Atlantis to Moses, which has kept people digging around for many decades in modern times. When philosophers write down laws, it is to give their fictional universe a more credible backstory. They do not have anything against laws, as long it is not applied to themselves. These people do not have a problem with associating themselves with the snake in Garden of Eden and seeing the deity behind the laws as evil. They live out their fantasies as law breakers to enjoy their own freedom of thought. Others are more conservative in their mindset and try to show off loyalty and obedience.

The idea that these texts were things people should follow, only applies to people who are not philosophers. Otherwise, what is the point in being a philosopher, if you could not argue your way out of all the bad things you did on the side? These people trained themselves in rhetoric specifically to avoid justice and accountability. It is one of the skills you were expected to have as a philosopher. Nobody who could not snake their way out of a tricky situation were suitable as advisors or teachers for kings. Breaking laws, fabricating lies, manipulating people into getting what you want... those are not bugs, but features. This was how ancient people saw it.

When some ancient person met a philosopher in the streets of some city, they knew that they would have covered entertaining for the whole evening. They invited them for dinner and their friends too, who would sit and zone out, by all the stories that went in one ear, while enjoying some good wine and beverages. This meant, if you were a philosopher, then you would not have to worry about food. You were covered. There were always people who wanted to listen to good stories. If people get tired of you in one city, then there was always a new one nearby. So, when they went on journeys, the philosopher brought a stick or staff to make the children looking for strangers along the road: "The Magi is coming! The Magi is coming!". This is top entertainment for these people.

Jesus gets invited into homes of people you might think of as his enemies. Why? Because these people know they are gonna get entertained. It is a common cultural thing that everybody knows happen all the time. They look forward to these events. Now, if they do not like what the stranger is saying, then they can just chase the stranger away from the village. The welcoming arms can quickly turn into a violent mob. Guess who is enjoying it the most? The village.

Like, Jesus enters Jerusalem while children wave palm leaves, but ends up on a cross. This is part of the village mentality. People reading these texts would recognize it immediately. They would think “Well, maybe crucifying the stranger is going too far. Throwing a few rocks might be fine.” This part of the story would be hilarious, because people know how other people react when a stranger comes to the village. The more welcoming the stranger is received, the funnier it is when the mood turns. At the end of the day, the village stands together. That is the point.

This is why philosophers travel around in these texts. The reader knows that when somebody is welcomed with opened arms to a village, they will run for their lives while people throw rocks at them in the end. It is a much funnier and entertaining story than somebody running a dusty school with bored students sending each other secret messages in class, or dissecting animals. No normal person wants to read about somebody vivisecting an animal (dissecting while it is still alive). They want to do the vivisecting themselves. This is not a thing that you put in your story.

The good story is an advertisement for the school. Of course it is not going to be that way when you study under Socrates. Where do people get the idea that they will follow Socrates around in the streets while he is debating people? You can not learn about medicine this way.

There are things that people get fascinated by when studying, but the good story is for entertaining children. It is a marketing device. It is not a real behavior of some philosopher. The philosopher or prophet might keep some drugs on them in case they get invited to dinner and share their “spices” to make the beverage a more interesting experience. However, the teacher does not do this with kids. Children are given stories that make them curious, to build up the market demand for education.

Why would Paul brag about being in the third heaven? It is to tell people that if he gets invited to dinner, then you will get a real good experience, because Paul is a master with these “spices”. This guy has even been in Arabia for whole three years. Who knows what people are smoking over there.

This is not the version of Christianity you learn in Sunday school, for obvious reasons. When people trade slaves and use their body fluids as ingredients for drugs, or produce anti-venoms for snake bites, or plug up some alabaster in your butt, it is not the kind of practice of medicine that modern humans think is proper for children. However, this is what ancient religion is about. It is not the kind of religion that you would expect using a modern mindset.

It was common to slaughter animals and look at their insides to predict the future, or to measure the positions of the stars in heaven, looking for comets or eclipses. The trajectory of the planet Venus in the morning and evening is a symbol of whatever savior figure you have in mystery cults. We have texts who use this symbolism explicitly. This is often the high point, the climax, in the story. Look up at the planet sky and you will find your savior. It is right there, in the sky. No reason to worry, look at the birds and flowers, the whole cosmos functions in a perfect mysterious harmony.

Everybody did the same thing in the ancient world, over and over. They all celebrated at the same days during the calendar, but to their own favorite deities. People fought each other over which diety was the best. They took slaves and sought revenge. Jesus did not condemn slavery even once and Paul was none the better. This is exactly what you would expect if these were normal ancient people. They live in the same cultural environment with so many similarities that people often compared pantheons and matched up deities one to one. It is so common that you can only pick out Jesus from any other savior figure, by arguing from the perspective of the later official religion that forbade all other competitors to their monopoly on medicine. You can make the argument work this far that Jesus was special, but not further.

Is that different from what philosophers do? Nope! They argue over which city state is “perfect”.

How can people live best together in society? When somebody writes a book about e.g. Marxism being the hot new thing, this is just another variant on the same theme that has been repeated thousands of times. You sell books. You open up schools. People call each other comrades and friends or brothers and sisters. There is a mystery you have to figure out. There is some ritual you have to go through to get accepted. People invite you to dinner and bring some stuff with them to make the evening better and more interesting. If you take apart Marxism and analyses it in every detail, then it will have the exact same cultural ingredients that you will find in Early Christianity.

What is the difference? To the modern mind, Marxists can call themselves philosophers. You might not need to agree with them, but they have the right to call themselves by that title. However, for Early Christianity, modern humans do not tend to view them as philosophers because they have an agenda to protect. It is an agenda to present history in a particular way to defend a single group.

When people do this, they do not accept ancient people as they were. People that just lived their lives: Bad, good and ugly. You are creating a mythical origin, a fabricated fairy tale, to explain the tradition of your own mental constructions. These people were philosophers. They might not been the kind of mainstream philosophy as you think about today. The fear that these people just made up a bunch of stuff that had huge consequences for what people believe today, is a kind of trauma, that people hold onto because they need something to believe in. People refuse sometimes to believe that somebody would just lie to them, not because of ill intent, but simply to sell more books. Right now, there are probably hundreds of people who are still digging or diving looking for Atlantis.

Plato invented Atlantis, Hell, Soul, Republic and a philosopher named Socrates walking around asking people questions, ending with sacrificing his own life for philosophy, which might or might not have been based on some real historical person, who probably was not the kind of character you get impressions from reading these texts. Because, these texts are introductory texts to philosophy and Socrates is used in thought experiments to teach children how philosophy works.

Plato is simply kidding with you.

Aristotle, a student of Plato, went to an island to study animals with his friend and student Theophrastus, who studied plants. Aristotle is considered the world's first zoologist, while Theophrastus is considered the world's first botanist. Aristotle became later the teacher of Alexander the Great, who spread his school to the whole Hellenistic empire. A few generations later, students of this school builds a Zoo in the Musuem of Alexandria. There, people could study and observe animals from their entire known world.

There were likely hundreds of schools like the one of Aristotle. It just survived because it managed to get to the top of an empire. All the schools, every single of them, does the same marketing gimmick to advertise. They produce good stories, or what we call it in the bible: A gospel.

When people just learn about Jesus and Aristotle, they are ignoring the hundreds of schools who all did the same thing, over and over. The main reason people do this, is to teach medicine. If you do not pass the initiation ritual, then you do not get to learn their secrets. This is how stuff worked.

If you want to know what philosophy is: Go visit a Zoo.

There is no difference between "natural philosophy" and "social philosophy" in Ancient Greece.

For future reading: Look up Erasmus Darwin, the Lunar Society and the Empiric school of medicine. Read about banned books in England vs Continental Europe. Look at how Immanuel Kant borrows ideas, 1-to-1, from banned proto-religion of his time. There is plenty stuff in there.