Four weeks of famous philosophers (notes)

Notes of: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bEhUCX8nkg>

Video 1: Four weeks of famous philosophers

These introductions may be helpful to get a quick idea, but they will not go into much detail on these philosopher’s works.

Video 2: Who Was Thales of Miletus?

*Core:* Sage of Greece, Prophet of the Eclipse and the West’s First Philosopher

*Bio:*

Thales was a philosopher, mathematician, scientist, entrepreneur and more that lived around 600 BCE. (around 100 years before Socrates). Aristotle credits him as being the first philosopher. Herodotus records him as the first man to ever predict a solar eclipse before it happened. Greece named him as one of the seven sages for all of his work.

*Gaps:*

These days we take it for granted that science and philosophy fill in explanatory roles that religion used to fill. You no longer ask a priest what makes lightning, you ask a scientist (well, you probably ask google, but you are looking for scientific answers). In thales’ time, everything was explained by the Gods. Thales was the first to try to explain phenomena through natural scientific theories.

*Other:*

Thales was the first recorded person to ever predict a solar eclipse. The eclipse was famous because it was so shocking that it ended a way between nearby countries. Since astronomers can theorize the exact date of the eclipse, some have argued that the end of this war is the earliest event in human history that we have an exact date for: May 28th 585 BCE.

*Fables:*

Thales was even featured in Aesop’s Fables. He is from “The Astrologer Who Fell Into A Well”. Though this fable made fun of Thales for missing the earth in front of him for the stars, his attempt to do the work of the Gods in the sky and explain the natural world through laws not religion was the beginning of western philosophy and science as we know it.

Video 3: Who Was Socrates?

*Core:* The father of Philosophy, the Gadfly of Athens, and The Original Martyr to Dissent

*Bio:*

Socrates lived around the 4th century BCE, and he did not look as nice as he is commonly presented. He was famously very ugly, with a fat nose and bulging eyes. He would wear the same clothes for days in a row. He was looked down on for this, significantly, as Athenian society valued male beauty highly. Despite natural disadvantages, Socrates became arguably one of the most famous and influential philosophers of all time. He never wrote anything himself, and it is often difficult to separate his ideas and personality from those of his students, particularly Plato, from whom we get much of our information about Socrates.

*Method:*

Socrates argued in the Athenian agora with anyone that would listen. He was known for spending time with the young rich men of Athens. His students would relish his dethroning of the local intellectuals. The Elenchus, or the Socratic Method involved Socrates questioning dogmatic intellectuals and demonstrating that they held contradictory beliefs. This dialectic reversal of asking questions and using someone else’s claims against them became a staple of education and philosophy.

*Delphi:*

The Oracle of Delphi claimed that Socrates was the wisest man in Athens. This shocked Socrates, because he famously claimed “All I know is that I know nothing”. This led him to question the claims and beliefs of others to see if anyone really did know more than he did. He concluded that perhaps what made the oracle think him wise was that he admitted his own ignorance, while others dogmatically asserted what they did not know.

*Trial:*

Socrates was brought to court on the charges of corrupting the youth and doubting the Gods of the city. INstead of pleading out, he argued vehemently in his own defense. Read Plato’s “Apology” if you are curious. He was eventually convicted and sentenced to death. Though he might have escaped or been given a stay of execution, he argued with his friends that he must follow the laws of Athens. He willingly drank hemlock and died. Though he never wrote anything, was quite ugly, and was detested by enough of Athenian society that he was put to death, Socrates is still a hero for many philosophers and held up as an example of what philosophy can do. He stood up for the right of people to question authority and doubt those in power.

Video 4: Who Was Plato?

*Core:* The First Academic, Inventor of the Forms, and Founder of all Western Philosophy

*Influence:*

The influence of Plato on Western society and Western thought cannot be understated. Alfred North Whitehead famously claimed that “the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato”. His expansive work addresses most if not all of the topics studied by philosophy.

*Life:*

Where Socrates is known for his deeds, actions, and temperament, Plato was known for his ideas and writings. If Socrates showed us a way to live, Plato told us what to think. Plato was the son of one of the wealthiest families in Athens. He studied under Socrates, but left Athens to travel around the Mediterranean after the trial. When he returned to Athens he founded the first recorded institute of higher education: The Academy.

*Forms and the Allegory of the Cave:*

Plato had many revolutionary ideas. One of the most important and iconic was his theory of the forms. According to Plato, all individual particular concrete objects are imperfect copies of the perfect forms. We see imperfect trees which are simply shadows of the form of a tree. Plato explains this idea with his famous Allegory of the Cave. Simply, Plato asks us to imagine prisoners chained in a cave where they can only see the shadows of objects that pass in front of a fire and hear echoes of voices off the cave wall. They think that the shadows are the real things, and that the sounds come from them. Only by moving out of this cave can we come into contact with the true perfect reality, the world of pure reason and the forms.

*Republic:*

In search of the perfect form of society and government, Plato wrote The Republic. In this, he envisions a society where everyone uses the skills that they have for the benefit of the society. It was ruled by Philosopher Kings, according to Plato, democracy put too much faith in the common man to rule. At its best, The Republic represents a utopian society ruled by reason. At its worst it envisions a totalitarian state with little regard for personal freedom or choice.

*Influence:*

Not only did Plato’s works influence the works of his most famous student Aristotle, but he had a profound influence on the theology of Christianity. His idea of the forms was the inspiration for the doctrine that man was made in the image of some perfect form of man, God. Nietzsche famously chided Christianity as merely Platonism for the masses.

Video 5: Who Was Aristotle?

*Core:* The Founder of the Lyceum, The Teacher of Alexander the Great, and The Father of Logic.

*Influence:*

In terms of influence, Aristotle is rivaled only by Plato. St Thomas Aquinas refers to him simply as “The Philosopher” and many Muslim scholars called him “The First Teacher”. Unlike Plato and Socrates, Aristotle had a greater focus on the importance of empirical evidence in his studies. Though many of his ideas about science were wrong, his rigorous methodology of using and collecting data is something we take for granted today.

*Bio:*

Aristotle studied at Plato’s Academy in Athens. After or around Plato’s death Aristotle left the Academy and Athens. For some time he was the teacher of Alexander the Great. Upon returning to Athens he started his own school known as the Lyceum in the Athenian gymnasium dedicated to the God Apollo.

*Logic:*

Aristotle created the field of symbolic, or formal logic, that is used in everything from philosophical arguments to computer programs today. His syllogisms, like: 1) All men are mortal 2) Socrates is a man C) Therefore Socrates is mortal, Were the foundation for what is known as syllogistic or categorical logic.

*Telos:*

Aristotle’s theories cover a wide range of disciplines from theatre to law and his works are still read by everyone from playwrights to lawyers. However, there are some common themes. Aristotle rejected Plato’s forms, in favor of a teleological explanation of the world. Appropriately, as his name means “the best purpose” in Greek, Aristotle’s philosophy focused on telos or purpose of all things. We were not shadows of perfect forms, but beings each with our own purpose in life. Everything, according to Aristotle, could be described in terms of its goal or purpose. All things had a purpose, and their natural state was to strive to achieve that purpose.

Teleological: relating to or involving the explanation of phenomena in terms of the purpose they serve rather than of the cause by which they arise.

*Ethics:*

The purpose of man, for Aristotle, was to reason. If we want to reason well, we need to reason virtuously. How can we be virtuous? In opposition to other, more modern ethical theories Aristotle talks less about what particular actions are good, but instead how to be a good person. The virtues that Aristotle extols are the balance between two vices. Bravery might be the balance between cowardice and brashness. Virtue Ethics exists to this day as one of the three main ethical theories (with consequentialism and deontology).

Video 6: Who Was Epicurus?

*Core:* Champion of Happiness, Inventor of The Problem of Evil and Founder of The Garden.

*Influence:*

Epicurus was a philosopher that lived in ancient Greece in the third century BCE. The study of Epucurus’ philosophy had a significant following as long as 600 years after his death. As the founder of one of the principal schools of philosophy in Athens, his ideas touched the lives of many. Some of his arguments such as the problem of evil and his arguments against the fear of death are still influential today.

This video will focus on his life rather than his philosophy as Carneades already did a video on that

*Life:*

Epicurus was born into poverty and sickness. He was sick and in pain most of his life. His family was exiled from their home after a war. Unlike many of the famous Greek philosophers, he spent little time in Athens until he established his school. In fact, he spent all but 2 of his first 35 years of life in Asia.

*Garden:*

When epicurus did return to Athens, he had a group of followers. They purchased a property for a school that would be known as Ho Kepos or The Garden. It was not lavish, but rather very simple and ascetic. Uniquely among philosophical schools, The Garden admitted women and even a slave. Epicurus preached a doctrine of happiness and friendship and he lived in the pursuit of peace as much as pleasure.

*Death:*

Epicurus died in agonizing pain at the age of 72. Even though he was in torment, he was at peace and dictated a heartfelt letter to a friend on his deathbed, exemplifying the peace and happiness that he spoke of in his philosophy. When he died, he left The Garden to trustees to continue the school and freed all of his slaves.

*The letter:*

“I have written this letter to you on a happy day to me, which is also the last day of my life. For I have been attacked by a painful inability to urinate, and dysentery, so violent that nothing can be added to the violence of my sufferings. But the cheerfulness of my mind, which comes from the recollection of all my philosophical contemplation. Counterbalances all these afflictions. And I beg you to take care of the children of Metrodorus, in a manner worthy of the devotion shown by the young man to me, and to philosophy.”

Video 7: Who Was Seneca?

*Core:* Teacher of The Emperor, Defender of Roman Stoicism, and Evader of Death

*Seneca:*

Lucius Annaeus Seneca the younger was a Roman politician and philosopher. He was born around 4 BCE. He was sickly much of his life, and on three occasions did Emperors or the Senate try to have him killed. When he finally killed himself, it took three tries. Ironically it was his illness that kept him alive. During his life, Seneca was a champion of the school of philosophy known as stoicism. Though it originated in Greece, it was actually quite popular in Rome.

*Hypocrisy:*

Unlike many of the philosophers in this series so far, Seneca did not practice what he preached. In spite of arguing, as the stoics did, that poverty was not evil or something to be avoided, he was one of the richest men in the world. He espoused the good of a private life in place of a public one, but was very involved in the public sphere. He claimed that we should live virtuously, and yet was often the center of scandal in Rome. Seneca was also a playwright. There is more debate as to whether these plays supported or undermined his arguments for stoicism. They certainly focus on the destructive force of emotions such as anger and passion, but whether these portrayals are fully in line with Seneca’s work is not clear.

*Stoicism:*

That said, Seneca did offer persuasive arguments in favor of Stoicism. While the original Stoics were also concerned with logic, metaphysics and epistemology to support a full philosophical framework, Seneca’s work focused primarily on their ethics. His arguments read more as advice for life, than claims about the nature of reality. He argued passionately against the dangers of anger and other emotions, while claiming that virtue and simplicity were the way to a good life. Even if his arguments were not always valid, his persuasive style was convincing and powerful.

*Death:*

It was said that Caligula would have had Seneca killed when he was young, but was told that Seneca would not live long, so he did not bother. Later, the Senate sentenced him to death for adultery, but Claudius instead exiled him. It was not until the emperor Nero, who Seneca had tutored as a boy, told him to kill himself, that Seneca finally died. He slit his wrists and legs but could not bleed out (due to his sickly state), he took hemlock and still lived. Finally, he was taken to a hot bath that opened up his veins and he died.

Video 8: Who Was Sextus Empiricus?

*Core*: Torchbearer of the Skeptics, Master of Ataraxia, and Only surviving Ancient Pyrrhonian

*Sextus*:

We could not leave the ancients without talking about the other principle school of thought, the skeptics. Plato’s academy eventually became the home of the academic skeptics (such as Carneades), and, if not for Sextus Empiricus those would be the only skeptics that we would be aware of. Sextus Empiricus was a Pyrrhonian Skeptic, and he is the only source that we have for the arguments of Pyrrhonian Skepticism. Appropriately, effectively nothing is known of Sextus. We do not know if he lived in Rome, Athens or Alexandria. We do not Know when he lived, other than that it was around the 2nd or 3rd centuries CE. It is believed that he was a medical doctor, of the empirical school, but otherwise his life is a mystery.

*Pyrrho*:

Sextus is our only source for Pyrrho and the school that he started. In the beginning of his book, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, Sextus explained the important difference between the Pyrrhonian skeptics and the Academic Skeptics. The academics asserted that nothing could be known, the Dogmatists (all non-skeptics) asserted that at least something can be known, the Pyrrhonians, on the other hand, assented to neither proposition.

*Ataraxia*:

There are some important differences between Carneades’ version of skepticism, and the original Pyrrhonian version extolled by Sextus. Sextus uses particular modes of doubting, or arguments against common claims. Sextus goes through several lists of these in his Outlines of Pyrrhonism. Carneades is skeptical of some, and in favour of others. A more significant difference is that, for Sextus, the goal of life is to be left in a state of apostasy or ataraxia, not to eventually find a set of beliefs that will stand up to the challenges of skepticism. He describes this as a peace or tranquility that one enters into when one has given up all dogma and is left free from claims being true or false.

*Influence*:

The works of Sextus Empiricus were very influential when they were rediscovered in the renaissance. Along with Cicero’s Academica which documented the academic skeptics, the work of Sextus touched the minds and influenced the arguments of many philosophers, such as Descartes, Hume, and Hegel.

Video 9: Who Was Saint Anselm?

*Core*: Father of the Scholastics, Archbishop of Canterbury and Inventor of the Ontological Argument.

*Anselm*:

Though many philosophers might first identify st.Anselm as the inventor of the ontological argument for the existence of God, he was also the father of the philosophical tradition known as Scholasticism and a prominent figure in the Church.

*Life*:

Anselm, born in 1033, always wanted to be a monk, and though his father forbade him from joining the roder where he grew up, in Aosta, he eventually accomplished his dream and more. He traveled to Bec and studied under Prior Lanfranc. He went on to become a monk, a Prior and later an Abbott in Bec. He eventually took up the post of the Archbishop of Canterbury and was posthumously canonized as a saint.

*Archbishop*:

Though he never wanted the post of Archbishop of Canterbury (and requested to be allowed to give it up), after accepting it, he fought vehemently for the rights of the Church to be free of the power of the crown. He disputed with kings so much that he was exiled from England not once but twice in his lifetime.

*Scholastics*:

Anselm was instrumental in formalizing much of medieval thought and theological claims into more formal philosophical arguments. Many consider him the father of the scholastic tradition which attempted to reconcile the logic and teaching of the Greeks with the doctrine of the Church and the teaching of the Bible. This led to a movement which searched for a rational justification for the existence of God.

*Ontological*:

Following this tradition, Anselm was best known in philosophy as the inventor of the ontological argument for the existence of God. Simply, there exists something that is the greatest thing imaginable. The idea of this thing would be greater if it was real, so it must be real. Therefore God exists.

Video 10: Who Was Saint Thomas Aquinas?

*Core*: Reconciler of Faith and Reason, Founder of Thomism, and Inventor of The Five Ways.

*Aquinas*:

Many theologians have worked to reconcile faith and reason, religion and philosophy. One of the most famous philosophers and theologians that worked to bring these two traditions together was St. Thomas Aquinas. Many of his works and arguments are still staples of both philosophical and theological studies today.

*Life*:

Aquinas was born in 1225. He studied theology and was interested in the newly rediscovered Aristotle. He became a Dominican and rose through the ranks to be on the faculty of Theology in Paris. He left Paris to travel, but was called back to defend including Aristotelian ideas in the church’s teachings against those that thought it was changing the charge for the worse. He eventually died traveling less than 20 miles from where he was born.

*Thomism*:

After his death, the teachings of Thomas Aquinas came under attack. This divided some elements of the church into Thomists and followers of other scholastic thinkers like William of Ockham. Thomism has had several revivals over time through such Popes as Leo XIII and John Paul II.

*Ways*:

In philosophy, Aquinas is famous for his “Five Ways” or five proofs of the existence of God. Here we will give a brief description of each.

1. The first of Aquinas’ ways is about change. Simply, everything changes, in order for anything (except God) to change, something else must change it. Since things do change, there must be something at the bottom of change which changes other things without being changed itself. This must be God.
2. The second follows the same formulation, but with causes. Since nothing but God can cause itself, and everything needs a cause, every casual chain must end in God, so God must exist.
3. The third way deals with existence. According to Aquinas, everything but God comes into being and ceases to exist. Since something cannot come from nothing, there must be something which never came into existence, Therefore God must exist.
4. The first three ways might be understood as versions of the cosmological argument. The fourth is Aquinas’ version of the ontological argument originally formulated by Anselm. Aquinas argues that for every quality , there must be something from which all other things get that quality which is the epitome of that quality. God is the only thing from which the quality good can emanate.
5. The fifth way is a version of the teleological argument, claiming that all things have a purpose, but a purpose requires that there be some creator or mind to give them that purpose, that must be God.

Though most philosophers generally find the ways unconvincing today, they were an important element of a tradition that continues today which attempts to reconcile faith and reason.

Video 11: Who Was Rene Descartes?

*Core*: Founder of Analytic geometry, Archenemy of the Skeptic, and Father of Modern Philosophy.

*Descartes*:

Rene Descartes was one of the most influential philosophers, mathematicians and scientists of all time. He was the impetus for the change in philosophical thought from the period of the scholastics to the modern thinkers. He made great strides in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, geometry and algebra and his writings are studied to this day.

*Life*:

Descartes was born in 1596 in France. He moved around a great deal throughout his life, though he spent over twenty years in the Dutch Republic, where he did a great deal of his work. Near the end of his life he was invited to the Swedish court to tutor Queen christina. He died there of pneumonia.

*Math*:

You may remember using coordinate planes in a math class to graph equations. These planes are often called Cartesian planes in honor of Descartes who was one of the first to use them to visually represent algebraic equations. He was also one of the first to ever use the superscript notation to represent powers 2^2.

*Philosophy*:

Descartes is probably best known for his work in philosophy. In his “Meditations on First Philosophy” he constructs a powerful skeptical scenario involving an Evil Deceiver. In doing so he expanded on the skeptical work of the ancient skeptics. He wanted to see if there was anything that could not be doubted even if the skeptic was granted all they wished. He thought we should build our epistemology up from a single indubitable point. He concluded that the one thing which cannot be doubted is that he exists and is a thinking thing. This is known as The Cogito for its translation into latin: Cogito Ergo Sum: I think, therefore I am.

*Influence*:

He went on in the Meditations to argue for the existence of God and for a form of dualism (that the world was made of both mental and physical substance). While his argument for the existence of God mirrored Anselm’s and was not the most convincing, his objections to skepticism and ideas of metaphysical dualism influenced philosophical thought for centuries to come.

Video 12: Who Was John Locke?

*Core*: Father of Empiricism, Champion of Revolutionaries, and Founder of Liberalism.

*Locke*:

John Locke, was an English philosopher that had a significant effect both on the way that people of the time thought of the mind and on the reasons that we believe governments are legitimate. His philosophy of empiricism (all knowledge comes from experience) stood in stark contrast to Descartes’ rationalism (knowledge may come from something other than experience).

*Life*:

Locke lived during a tumultuous time in English history. Born in 1632, he came of age during the English revolution and Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate. In his life, he would see the crown return to power and eventually be transformed into a constitutional monarchy during the Glorious Revolution.

*Shaftesbury*:

Locke studied medicine under Robert Boyle (of Boyle’s Law). Locke is credited with using his medical understanding to save the life of the Earl of Shaftesbury when serving as his personal physician. Shaftesbury returned the favor by loaning Locke some of his political ideas as the founder of the Whig movement. Locke served under Shaftesbury as Secretary of the Board of Trade and Plantations and the secretary to the Lords Proprietor of Carolina.

*Politics*:

Locke wrote two famous works in his life on politics and epistemology. His work on politics was known as Two Treatises of Government. One of the central ideas in the treatises regarded the legitimacy of a government. In the first treatise, he argued against using a king’s divine right as a way to legitimize government. In the second he argued that governments are given legitimacy by the consent of the governed, and that populations had not only the right, but the responsibility to mount a revolution. These were the very same principles that guided the Glorious Revolution as it replaced that absolute power of the monarch with a constitutional monarchy.

*Empiricism*:

Locke was one of the first empiricists. They claimed, in contrast to the rationalists, that the only way to gain knowledge was through experience. In his book, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding Locke famously claimed that the mind is a blank slate, or a tabula rasa when we are born. Only through experience can we write about it, or learn more.  
*Qualities*:

Locke also made a distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities are those that exist without people, such as shape, number or motion. Secondary qualities are those that require some human input like color or sound. According to Locke, without a person to give a vibration in the air or an electromagnetic wave meaning, you do not have sound or a color. These qualities are not in the objects themselves, they are made by our mind’s interaction with the objects. If a tree falls in the middle of the woods, it does not make a sound.

Video 13: Who Was Benedict De Spinoza?

*Core*: Prophet of Pantheism, One of The Three Great Modern Rationalists and The Prince of Philosophers.

*Spinoza*:

Benedict De Spinoza, known alternatively as Baruch Spinoza was born in 1632. During his life, Spinoza reimagined God not as a personified entity as described in the Bible or the Torah, but rather as the substance that made up the world. Though a Rationalist, he challenged Descartes’ substance dualism arguing that everything was made of one substance, and that substance was God. Though his rigorous works are highly regarded (Gilles Deleuze called him the Prince of Philosophers) Spinoza is often glossed over or skipped in studies of the Rationalists.

*Life*:

Spinoza was born in a Jewish Portuguese community in Holland. He grew up studying the Jewish faith, though his radical ideas of God would eventually leave him excommunicated from the Jewish community in Amsterdam. Though given the opportunity to teach at a university, he lived out his life as a simple lens grider, spending his free time perfecting his philosophy.

*Pantheism*:

Spinoza pioneered a position in philosophy that would later come to be known as Pantheism in his book Ethics. He argued that God was not some personified being that cared what you did or sent you to heaven or hell. For Spinoza, God was simply the substance that made up everything. In order to understand the will of God, we should not study the scriptures, rather we should study nature and the natural world. To understand good and evil we should not look at things from our own limited perspective, but rather from a global perspective, from the view of eternity.

*God*:

Spinoza’s argument for a pantheistic God was actually quite simple. It might be summarized as follows:

1. For a substance to exist it must have at least one property.
2. If two things share a property they must be the same substance.
3. God exists and has all properties.
4. God shares properties with everything that exists.
5. Conclusion: God is the same substance as everything that exists.

Logic form (I am still learning second order so don’t judge too hard):

1. (∀x)(∃P)(Px)
2. (∀x)(∀y)(∀P)((Px^Py)=>(x=y))
3. (∃x)(Gx^(∀P)(Px))
4. This one is a bit more complicated, so here is the logical proof (I skipped out the “(∃x)(∀y)(∃P)(Gx=>(Px^Py)”):
5. (∃P)(Pb) (1, UI)
6. Ab (4.a, EI)
7. (∀y)(∀P)((Pa^Py)=>(a=y)) (2, UI)
8. (∀P)((Pa^Pb)=>(a=b)) (4.c, UI)
9. (Aa^Ab)=>(a=b) (4.d, UI)
10. Ga^(∀P)(Pa) (3, EI)
11. (∀P)(Pa) (4.f, Simp)
12. Aa (4.g, UI)
13. Aa^Ab (4.b, 4.h, Add)
14. (a=b) (4.e, 4.i, MP)
15. Ga (4.f, Simp)
16. Ga=>(a=b) (4.j, 4.k, Imp)
17. (∀y)(Ga=>(a=y)) (4.l, UG)
18. (∃x)(∀y)(Gx=>(x=y)) (4.m, EG)

This argument could possible be phrased with the 3rd statement: “(∃x)(Gx=>(∀P)(Px))”, but I’m not too sure if this would work, you should try! His argument is not to convince one of the existence of god, but to convince one for their belief implying that God must be of Pantheist nature (please correct me if I wrote “Pantheist” wrongfully.)

*Spinoza*:

In his time, Spinoza was denounced as a heretic and an atheist by Christians and Jews alike. However his philosophy did not so much represent a critique of God himself, but rather an objection to the conception of God put forward by holy texts and modern religion. Influenced by the Stoics, and Seneca in particular, Spinoza championed a life free from religious guilt whose purpose was not to believe blindly, but rather to investigate the world and use reason to discover God’s purpose.

Video 14: Who Was Gottfried Von Leibniz?

*Core*: Most Prolific Philosopher of All Time, Inventor of Calculus, and The Last “Universal Genius”.

*Leibniz*:

It is impossible to briefly explain the sheer magnitude of the contributions of Gottfried Wilhelm Von Leibniz. In his life he made significant contributions to mathematics, logic, ethics, probability theory, biology, medicine, geology, psychology, theology, linguistics, philosophy, physics, technology, philology, history, law and politics. He wrote over 50,000 documents throughout his lifetime. He communicated via letters with over 1000 different people. A compilation of the complete works of Leibniz was started in the early 1900’s and it has yet to be completed. Fifty seven volumes have been published so far, representing only about half of his lifetime. It is anticipated that the project will not be complete until the middle of the twenty-first century. Hopefully, it goes without saying that any attempt to give a comprehensive summary of the works and ideas of Leibniz cannot be accomplished in a single video. Therefore, we will briefly touch on some influential elements of his work in mathematics and his work on philosophy. Specifically, we will touch on his contributions to calculus, and his ideas about modality and religion.

*Life*:

Leibniz was born in 1646 in Leipzig. Leibniz’s father was a professor at the local university and his son had free range of his father’s library while growing up. He entered his father’s university at the age of 15. By the age of 16 he had graduated with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy. At the age of 18 he was awarded a master’s degree. He was given a degree in law after one year of study at age 19. That same year he published his first book. At age 20 he earned a doctorate in law as well as his license to practice law. For most of his life, Leibniz made his living in law, politics, and international diplomacy. He fell out of favour in his later life due in large part to the dispute between him and Isaac Newton regarding the invention of calculus.

*Calculus*:

Around the same time both Leibniz and Newton claim to have invented Calculus. Generally, today we consider them both independent inventors of Calculus. The notation that we use today for calculus can be credited to Leibniz. However, at the time it was a heated debate that led to him falling out of favor. Due to this and other disputes near the end of his life, very few notable thinkers and politicians attended his funeral and his grave was left unmarked for many years.

*Modality*:

Leibniz did revolutionary work in the area of modality, or possible worlds. According to Leibniz, other possible worlds are ideas in the mind of God. There are an infinite number of possible worlds. God looked at all of those possible worlds and chose one to actualize. In fact, God actualized the best of all possible worlds. Leibniz imagined this possible world as a pyramid with each level getting closer and closer to the perfect best of all possible worlds at the top. This pyramid culminates in this world, the actual world, which is the best of all possible. According to Leibniz, there is always a worse world than any world you can imagine. Therefore, there are an infinite number of possible worlds that were unactualized in the mind of God.

Video 15: Who Was Voltaire?

*Core*: Champion of Freethinkers, Defender of the Encyclopedia, and The Man That Brought Philosophy to the Masses.

*Voltaire*:

Unlike other philosophers in this series, Voltaire did not have any particularly original or influential philosophical ideas. He was a poet and a playwright just as much, if not more than he was a philosopher. However, Voltaire had a significant influence on the direction of philosophy and the philosopher's place in the world. He championed dissent and free thinking. His writing made much of philosophy accessible to the masses and he brought the philosophical debates of the time out of the halls of academia and into the public sphere. He represented a shift towards what would come to be known as the Enlightenment.

*Life*:

Born in 1693, Francois-Marie Arouet is better known today under his pen name, Voltaire. His father wanted him to be a lawyer, but he wanted to be a writer. Throughout his life he wrote over 2,000 books and over 20,000 letters. He was exiled to England at one point for his words. When he returned he ensured his future fortunes by making a great deal of money rigging the lottery. He avoided political scrutiny for a time by hiding away in the house of his friend and lover Emilie Du Chatelet (an impressive intellectual in her own right) in her husband’s chateau. After her death, he traveled, continuing to infuriate the intellectual establishment around him with his ideas. He was a close friend of Ben Franklin up to his death.

*Free Speech*:

He was a champion of free speech and the right and responsibility to speak out. He challenged the doctrines of academics and organized religions alike. He loved to defend controversial views, often to defend the right of free speech, than because he personally supported them, including the very idea of philosophy itself. Voltaire was well known, not for making particularly innovative arguments in defense of free speech, but rather by demonstrating what a philosopher can do by challenging the status quo. His biographer summed up his attitude perfectly with a quote that is often attributed to Voltaire himself “I disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

*Newton*:

In 1734, Voltaire published a book entitled Lettres Philosophique. This included a discussion and defense of Newtonian science, to the great confusion of modern historians, the book caused a public uproar and a harsh reaction from the French authorities. The book was publically burned and Voltaire would have been jailed had he not been able to escape to the safety of Du Chatelet’s chateau. Instead of backing down, Voltaire inflamed the debate by bringing these Newtonian claims of action at a distance into direct opposition with the Cartesian thought that was common in France at the time. Though he did not introduce new or revolutionary ideas, he convinced the public to abandon the ideas of Descartes for the new Enlightenment ideas of Newton.

*Encyclopedia*:

Voltaire went on to challenge other philosophers and bring the discussions of their works into the public forum. He critiqued the works of Leibniz (mocking his claim that we live in the best of all possible worlds in his satirical novella, Candide) and challenged the church on several levels. One of the most prominent was his defense of the first Encyclopedia, edited by Diderot and d'Alembert, came under harsh criticism from the church as they were concerned about any book other than the bible being used as general reference, and the incredulity of some articles in regards to miracles. Though it was put on the list of banned books and some of the authors were jailed, the encyclopedia eventually became the preeminent reference book for academics, due in no small part to the actions of Voltaire.

Video 16: Who Was David Hume?

*Core*: The Great Infidel, THe Mighty Modern Skeptic and The Greatest Anglophone Philosopher of All Time.

*Hume*:

David Hume is one of the most influential philosophers of all time, outranked only by such greats as Aristotel, Plato, and Kant. He was a famous skeptic, empiricist and natural philosopher. Though some of his positive projects around his own epistemology and explanation of mind were considered less than successful, his skepticism of everything from religion and scholastic argument, to science and causation, to the concept of self and the possibility of knowledge represent powerful criticism to these institutions to this day.

*Life*:

David Hume was born to what might be considered a middle class family in 1711. Like many philosophers he was destined for a career in law, but gained an “aversion to everything but philosophy”. He was a stubborn child that refused to listen to his professors and dropped out without graduation. Though he wrote several very influential and significant books throughout his lifetime, he struggled to hold a job through much of his early life. It was not until the success of his “The History of England” that he gained financial stability and the fame that he was seeking. He spent much of his later life relaxing, spending time with friends and revising his works. His most controversial work criticizing religion was published posthumously.

*Induction*:

Hume was famously skeptical of many different positions of the time, including the relatively new scientific method. Hume argued that induction, the method of making generalizations from individual cases could not be deductively valid. If every swan you see is white, you cannot validly conclude that all swans are white. In order to make any such conclusion, you need the principle of the uniformity of nature (that the past will be like the future), but the only way to prove that principle is through induction.

*Causality*:

Hume was also skeptical of causality itself. He argued that causal relations could either be a priori relations between ideas or a posteriori facts about the world. They cannot be a priory because we cannot know without experiencing the effects, for example, of a sip of hemlock on the human body. However, it is only through using induction, that we already doubted, that one can take the facts of the world, every time we observe someone taking hemlock, they die, and generalize that constant correlation into a rule which claims the Hemlock caused them to die.

*Religion*:

Hume posthumously published his most controversial text challenging the ideas of religion. In the past he had been challenged about being an atheist and being a heathen. Using his characteristics of Philo, Demea, and Cleanthes, Hume argued against the teleological argument for the existence of God and claimed that we should reject the ideas of miracles. He wrote extensively, and generally from a very skeptical perspective on every religious subject of the time.

Video 17: Who Was Jean-Jacques Rousseau?

*Core*: Reconciler of Freedom and Slavery, Inspiration for The Reign of Terror, and Father of Problem Based Learning.

*Rousseau*:

Jean Jacques Rousseau was an Enlightenment philosopher, composer, and writer who wrote about political systems and education. His political philosophy can be read in a variety of ways. Some claim that his ideas were an inspiration for the rule of Robespierre in The Reign of Terror, while others claim his ideas were one of the bases for American Democracy. He also wrote several operas, and his novel Julie, or the New Heloise was influential in the beginnings of the romanticism movement.

*Life*:  
Rousseau was born in 1712 in Geneva. His mother died in childbirth and his father, a watchmaker, gave him up when he was exiled from the city. He eventually came under the care of a noblewoman, Madame de Warens. This relationship afforded him the opportunity to meet diderot and eventually contributed to his encyclopedia. After winning a prize in an essay writing competition, Rousseau published his first book around age forty, but was instantly successful. He continued to write until his opinions forced him to flee to England at the invitation of David Hume. He struggled there with mental illness and became convinced that Hume was plotting against him. He returned to France and completed many works but eventually is suspected to have committed suicide after a long battle with depression.

*Politics*:

Rousseau famously opened his book The Social Contract by saying: “Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains.” This theme of attempting to find a balance between individual rights dn the authority of the state pervaded much of his work. Rousseau feared that the masses would leave themselves subject to an elite ruling minority for fear of falling into a state of war. According to Rousseau, we must avoid this by taking our laws and dictums from “the general will” or the opinions that are agreed on by all citizens. Since these citizens are only subject to something they agree to, they are able to conform to the authority of the state without sacrificing their own personal freedom. The problem with this approach was that his specific definition of “the general will” was inexact. Was this the will of the majority of the society and therefore should inspire the subjugation of the minority by the majority. Was it instead the abstract path that would lead to the good of society (regardless of the opinions of individual citizens)? The application of how to deal with individuals whose will disagreed with the will of the society or refused to comply was somewhat dark. According to Rousseau “This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free” Many take this almost totalitarian interpretation to have been one of the inspirations for Robespierre’s Reign of Terror.

*Education*:

Rousseau also wrote on the philosophy of education. He claimed that we should not force children to learn particular things, but rather that we should put them in such an environment where they can learn for themselves. According to Rousseau, it is the job of the tutor not to attempt to manipulate or mold the mind of the children directly, but rather to design the children’s environment in such a way as to allow the children to discover things for themselves. Students should learn through practical experience for Rousseau, and they should be punished with the natural consequences of their actions instead of with physical force.

Video 18: Who Was Immanuel Kant?

*Core*: Uniter of Rationalism and Empiricism, Creator of the Categorical Imperative, and The Greatest Modern Philosopher.

*Kant*:

Immanuel Kant was arguably the most important philosopher of the modern era. Throughout all of history, only Plato and Aristotle had more influence. Kant made significant advances in Ethics and Metaphysics. His transcendental Idealism was credited by some with resolving the disagreement between the Empiricists and the rationalists that had dominated philosophical discourse for centuries. His Categorical Imperative is still considered to be one of the three principle ethical theories that are studied to this day. He set the stage for much of the philosophy of the next two centuries.

*Life*:

Born Emmanuel Kant in 1724, Kant spent almost every day of his life in his birthplace, Konigsberg. Though his family was never entirely impoverished, they were simple tradesmen that were in no way well off. Kant attended college in his hometown. Afterward he worked as a tutor elsewhere for 6 years. After this period, he returned home where he taught philosophy at the local university for over 40 years before retiring. As a professor his schedule was miraculously regimented (it was claimed that local women would set clocks by his morning jog). Philosophers divide Kant’s life into three periods, his pre-critical period where his writings focus on finding a good method to do philosophy, a silent middle period where he wrote next to nothing, and the critical period where he wrote his major works (Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason, and Critique of Judgement).

*Distinctions*:

In order to understand some of the most important elements of Kant’s philosophy we need to talk about two distinctions in philosophy. The first is the distinction between a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge. A priori knowledge is knowledge that can be gained without sense experience, 2+2=4, while a posteriori experience is gained through sense experience, the sky is blue. The other distinction is between synthetic propositions and analytic propositions. Analytic propositions are those where the meaning of one term is contained in the other: bachelors are unmarried men. In synthetic propositions, the meaning of one term is not included in the other term: John is a bachelor.   
*Metaphysics*:

Kant is credited with resolving the debate between empiricists and the rationalists. In order to understand Kant’s signature achievement, we need to first remember an argument offered by David Hume who, by Kant’s own words, woke him from his “dogmatic slumber”. Hume argued that we cannot have knowledge of such things as causality, since our understanding of them cannot be a priori (I cannot know what a fire will do to a paper without experience) but it cannot be a posteriori (I cannot only through experience know that the paper will always burn). According to Kant, Hume’s mistake was that he assumed that the only kind of a priori knowledge was of analytic propositions. Kant will claim that we can have a priori, synthetic knowledge. According to Kant such statements as 2+3=5 are synthetic (nothing about the meaning of 2 and 3 means the same thing as 5), and yet we do not need experience to learn that 2+3=5. Kant will leverage this notino to attempt to resolve the disagreement between the rationalists and the empiricists. Kant claimed that we are born with synthetic, a priori concepts, like number, time and space which we apply to experience. Unlike Hume, when faced with the possibility that we cannot gain these ideas through experience and that we could not have knowledge without them, Kant claims that we must have had them all along. Kant did not reject the skepticism of Hume entirely though. According to Kant we can only have knowledge about the world of experiences, or the phenomenological world, not the world as it actually is, or the noumenological world.

*Ethics*:

Kant’s work in ethics was also important and revolutionary. He wanted to find a justification for action that was not based in religion. He was searching for a “categorical imperative”. This would be some rule that was not just good for doing something (like a shovel is good for digging holes) but good itself (if an object does the task it is good for the job (idunno im not astrophysics)). Kant wanted this rule to be based on reason itself. Kant arrived at the idea of claiming that an action is good if we can universalize it into a rule without it becoming self-defeating. You should not steal because if everyone stole the idea of property would fall apart. You should not kill because if everyone killed then the very idea of living life would fall apart. If it cannot be generalized it is bad (you cannot eat candy once a week because if everyone ate candy once a week nothing bad would happen). If it can be, it is good. For example, everyone should keep promises, if we all did this, the institution of promises would not fall apart.

Video 19: Who Was Mary Wollstonecraft?

*Core*: Founder of Feminism, Champion of Social Justice and Mother of Women’s Suffrage.

*Wollstonecraft*:

Mary Wollstonecraft is often considered one of the founders of Feminism. She is one of the few women to have broken into the male-dominated world of philosophy (and will be the only woman we will look at in this series). Her radical work on the rights of women was ahead of its time (I guess he is implying that it was radical for the time and not a universal kind or radical because that is clearly biased to his perspective on feminism). Not only has it been revived during the first and second waves of feminism (during the women’s suffrage movement and the women’s rights movement of the 1960’s). Her views are still studied to this day and have an impact on the struggles facing modern women and feminists.

*Life*:

Wollstonecraft’s life was unconventional for a woman in her time. It was so unconventional that when her loving widower published a very frank memoir of her life, she was openly mocked and reviled. She was born in 1759 to a family whose fortunes were taking a turn for the worse. Her father was a violent drunk that abused her mother, so much that it is said Wollstonecraft would often sleep in front of her mother’s door to protect her. She continued to advocate for women when she pulled her sister, who was suffering from depression, out of a marriage. Wollstonecraft gained her education in nontraditional ways, both through her relationship with others and by translating some of the great works. She wrote novels in addition to philosophyShe had a child by a man, Gilbert Imlay, outside of wedlock, but he spurned her. After several suicide attempts, she began a relationship with William Godwin and eventually married him (though they both disagreed with the institution of marriage). She died not long after bearing him a daughter who would become Mary Shelley, the author of Frankenstein.

*Rights of Man*:

One of Wollstonecraft’s first forays into political philosophy was her Vindication of the Rights of Man where she argued against Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the revolution in France. Wollstonecraft’s critique was unique in that it took on Burke’s general political philosophy instead of specific claims. She argued that what we needed was more freedom and a simplification of many of the institutions of government. Burke, on the other hand, was concerned that abolishing systems in favor of abstract rights of humans would run contrary to culture and human nature (imo this way he calls human nature really just is culture, I heard of this civilization in africa where dads create the kids and moms are the ones who work, the Aka/Bayaka, human nature: “the general psychological characteristics, feelings, and behavioral traits of humankind, regarded as shared by all humans.”, clearly not all humans follow a single gender role system).

*Rights of Woman*:

In her most famous piece, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft puts forward an argument for women’s education. She claims that until women are given the tools of reason, and are given worth by their minds instead of their appearance, they cannot be free, or even fully human. Wollstonecraft wanted to give women the opportunity to take control of themselves and not be considered property, but functioning members of society. She did not argue that they should have power over men, but rather had the right to have power over themselves.

*Education*:

Wollstonecraft disagreed severely with Rousseau’s philosophy of education. Rousseau claimed that women would not be able to grasp abstract truths and axioms and that their educations should be drastically different (boooooo Rousel such), that women should be educated to be gentle, while men should be educated to reason, lest women gain power over men. Wollstonecraft chastised Rousseau arguing that this ability to reason was not for the purpose of women gaining power over men, but rather women gaining power over themselves.

Video 20: Who Was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel?

*Core*: Inventor of Dialectic Logic, Forefather of Marxism and Most impenetrable Western Philosopher You WIll Ever Read.

*Hegel*:

One of the most difficult philosophers to read, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel attempted to expand on many of the ideas of Kant. Due to the density of his works (and the fact that he used many words he invented himself) there is a certain degree of controversy over what exactly is meant by many of Hegel’s claims. But despite this difficulty, Hegel managed to be a pioneer in logic and the philosophy of history. Though much of his logical work has been passed over, his historical and political work greatly influenced Marx and remains interesting to this day.

*Life*:

Hegel was born in Germany in 1770 to a relatively well off family. His mother died when he was young from a fever. When in seminary school he became friends with two significant figures in their own rights, Friedrich Holderlin, a poet and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, soon to be a significant philosopher. After spending some time tutoring, Hegel came to Jena at the invitation of Schelling where he taught until Napoleon came through. He eventually taught at the University of Heidelberg and later served as the chair and later rector of the University of Berlin. He left Berlin due to his weak health during a cholera outbreak, but returned before the disease had run its course and died soon after.

*Dialectics*:

Hegel was frustrated that Kant’s philosophy claimed that we could know nothing of the noumenal world. Therefore, he set out to resolve this problem through what he would call a dialectic logic, but can best be understood in the context of philosophy of history. According to Hegel, we begin with a thesis, or idea. That thesis continues until it reaches something which contradicts it, an antithesis. Faced with this contradiction, we create a synthesis, which accounts for both thesis and antithesis. This synthesis becomes our new thesis (sum fake function cringey shit I decided to make up: A = T(T(A),anti(T(A)))

*Dialectics*:

According to Hegel, this method of dialectic logic was the best way to handle contradictions or antinomies in philosophy. He attempted to find a synthesis from many different contradictions such as mind and body, idealism and materialism, the state and the individual etc. One such distinction that Hegel attempted to synthesize was the idea of human freedom as either completely rational libertarian freedom, or a deterministic battle between reason and the passions. He did so by arguing for a certain type of compatibilism involving choosing to lead an ethical life and participate in social institutions, like family or government which were the real objects of freedom.

*Absolute*:

This process was characterized by Hegel as the process of coming to self consciousness or understanding oneself. This was not an individual process, but rather a collective one. Humanity was working towards the realization of an absolute spirit. What Hegel exactly means by this is debated, it might have been a full expression of human knowledge, an infinite God, or a kind of transcendence. Due to his original methodology and unique use of language, his exact ideas remain unclear to this day.

Video 21: Who Was John Stuart Mill?

*Core*: Champion of Utilitarianism, Defender of Freedom of Speech, and The Greatest English Speak Philosopher of the 19th Century.

*Mill*:  
John Stuart Mill is probably best known as one of the first proponents and defenders of Utilitarianism. Following Jeremy Bentham he defended a unique consequentialist view of ethics. However, he also outlined the logical basis for the scientific method and provided powerful arguments in favour of naturalism, in opposition to Kant. Furthermore, he gave one of the most stirring defenses of freedom of speech in his book On Liberty.

*Life*:

John Stuart Mill was born in 1806. He was groomed to be a philosopher all his life by his father and Jeremy Bentham. Before the age of eight, he had read Plate, Euclid and Herodotus. His father kept him very sheltered, not allowing him to have friends his own age. He was sent to study with Bentham and other liberals. He struggled with depression at this point in his life as he realized that inventing a just society, the life goal laid out for him by his family, would not bring him happiness. He worked for much of his life for the East India Company and defended British Colonial Rule in India claiming the people there were not civilized, but barbarous and needed to be ruled. After marriage, he became even more of an outspoken advocate for women’s rights. When he became an MP he was the first advocate of women’s suffrage in Parliament. He was made the Godfather of Bertrand Russell before he died in 1873.

*Science*:

Mill attempted to provide a logical structure for science. Though he admitted that Hume’s problem of induction made it so that science could not prove anything with certainty, he contended that our scientific axioms had been arrived at, not by some innate ability (as Kant did), but rather through testing and generalization of the results.

*Utilitarianism*:

Mill is probably best known for his ethical theory known as utilitarianism. This contends that the right things to do is what creates the most happiness for the most people (I am guessing that this means you have to maximise average happiness while at the same time minimising average wealth inequality, seems pretty neat imo). Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism since it judges the actions of people based on their consequences, not their intentions. While other elements of Mill’s philosophy may have faded away, Utilitarianism is still touted as one of the three major ethical positions, with Kant’s Deontology and Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics.

*Freedom*:

Mill’s On Liberty includes a strong defense of the right to free speech. For Mill, if all of the elements of a debate could be freely brought out into the public sphere, a rational conclusion could be reached (while censorship of opinions made any conclusion irrational). Mill thought these freedoms were important in order to protect a majority from silencing a minority.

Video 22: Who Was William James?

*Core*: Founder of Pragmatism, Father of American Psychology, and One of the Most Influential American Philosophers Of All Time.

*James*:

William James was an influential philosopher and psychologist. He was one of the founders of Pragmatism, a theory of truth which attempted to answer some of the claims of skepticism. He also defended faith in his famous paper responding to William Clifford: The Will to Believe.

*Life*:

William James was born in 1842 to a famous family. His brother, Henry James was the author of such famous works as Turn of The Screw and The Portrait of A Lady. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the leader of the Transcendentalist movement, was his Godfather. James’ primary education was in medicine, and he eventually would go on to lecture in physiology at Harvard. He had no formal education in psychology or philosophy, though he eventually became a lecturer in both of these fields. He reputedly said that the first psychology lecture he ever heard was the first one that he taught. A champion of functionalism in psychology, James founded the American Society for Psychical Research before his death in 1910.

*Pragmatism*:

James explained Pragmatism as the resolution of the debate between tough minded materialists and tender minded idealists. James was a staunch opponent of the skeptic, claiming that we should not doubt our basic beliefs until we have reason to do so. To James, the practical consequences of our beliefs were more important than the philosophical justification for them.

*Belief*:

William Clifford argued that belief without evidence, such as religious faith was not merely unjustified, but unethical. James famously responded to this argument by claiming that there are certain situations in which we can ethically believe things that are unjustified, namely when the question is live, forced and momentous.

Video 23: Who Was Friedrich Nietzsche?

*Core*: Killer of God, Inventor of the Ubermensch, and Prophet of Nihilism.

*Nietzsche*:

Friedrich Nietzsche was an influential and often misinterpreted German Philosopher. He challenged many values systems and methodologies of his time in the interest of moving past them. Though his “Superman” or Ubermensch is often likened to a Nazi Aryan “Master Race” in fact he was speaking more of an Aristotelian man of virtue. This confusion often comes from the posthumous publication of an altered version of his works by his sister, a Nazi. He is also often misunderstood as a staunch advocate of Nihilism, when in fact he simply predicted that a descent into Nihilism was inevitable, and argued that we should move through and past it quickly.

*Life*:

Nietzsche was born the son of a potestant minister in 1844. His father died when Nietzsche was 5 from a brain condition. His brother died 6 months later. Being fatherless gained him a scholarship to the Schulpforta, a well recognized school. He received a professorship at the university of Basel at the young age of 24. Unfortunately, after an accident on a horse and several diseases, he was forced to retire at age 35. From then until 1889 he traveled around Europe writing and searching for climates conducive to his failing health. He suffered a mental break in 1889. It is said that he collapsed after trying to protect a horse from a beating. He gained acknowledgement and fame in the last ten years of his life, though, due to his deteriorating mental health, it is doubtful that he realized it. He died in 1900 of a stroke.

*Nihilism*:

Nietzsche famously claimed that “God is Dead”. This symbolized, not the physical death of a deity, but rather the demise of the Christian worldview and morality in the favor of a more secular, scientific and logical world view. Nietzsche argued that with this fall of the standing morality we would devolve into Nihilism, a kind of skepticism with a particularly destructive or irreverent tone. Though Nietzsche argued against these traditional religious and metaphysical modes of interpretation, he did not want us to permanently descend into Nihilism, but rather to temporarily move through it as a way of abolishing old dogma. Nietzsche did not merely challenge traditional ideas of religion, but classic ideas of truth and morality as well.

*Ubermensch*:

In order to fill this void left by Nihilism, Nietzsche hoped that we could rise to a higher level of humanity through superhumans or overmen. This was not meant to be a justification of the racial purification advocated by the Nazis, but rather an incitement to foster people who were able to rise above both the dogmas of the past and Nihilism to create new values and new morality based on naturalists ideals. The idea was not that some people or some races of people are naturally better than others, but rather that we should endeavor to rise above common impulses towards conformity to be “higher men” through cultural enrichment.

Video 24: Who Was Gottlob Frege?

*Core*: Inventor of Modern Logic, Champion of Logicism, and Founder of Analytic Philosophy.

*Frege*:

Though he was largely unnoticed in his lifetime, Frege’s work had a profound and lasting impact on 20th century philosophy. Frege wrote one of the three most important logical texts of all time. He invented propositional calculus (or quantification logic) which eventually overtook Aristotle’s categorical logic as the primary logic used in philosophy. He pioneered the so-called “Linguistic Turn” which led philosophers to examine our commitments in terms of the language that we use. He was one of the champions of a position known as logicism, which claimed that math could be reduced to logical statements.

*Life*:

Frege’s life was not as eventful as many philosophers we have examined. He was born in 1848, in modern day Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany. His father was the principal of a girl’s high school. He studied at a gymnasium in Wismar, and after graduating went on to study at the university of Jena and later the University of Gottingen. He did his PhD work in mathematics, specifically geometry. After graduating he turned to logic, his first book, Begriffsschrift outlined his new form of logic which used variables and the rules of a formal language to function. He would go on to publish Grundgesetze der Arithmetik (considered one of the three most important texts in logic of all time) and his well known “On Sense and Reference” before his death in 1925.

*Logic*:

Up until this point in history, our understanding of formal logic had been purely Aristotelean, or what we might today call categorical logic. This logic took all sentences as having a subject and a predicate, and explained several relations (all x are y, no x are y, some x are y, and some x are not y). Between these two categorical things. Frege’s logic took this further and could handle other relations and quantify over them. Statements like all dogs chase some cats who chase some rats who eat some cheese became easy to represent: (∀x)(Dx=>(∃y)(Cy^CHSxy^(∃z)(Rz^CHSyz^CHEz)))).

*Logicism*:

Frege was a staunch advocate of a position known as Logicism which claimed that mathematics could be reduced to logic. Frege famously failed in this project due to one of the axioms of his system, called Basic Rule V which Russell pointed out to him in a letter just before the book’s publication, could be used to derive Russell’s paradox. Frege attempted to modify the rule, but was unsuccessful. Some philosophers still believe that we can represent all of mathematics with the laws of formal logic.

*Sense*:

Frege also made great advances in the Philosophy of Language. One of his most famous publications was “On Sense and Reference”. The sense of a word was the way it was presented, and the reference of a word was the object that it referred to. For example ‘the morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ are two different senses for the same object. Both phrases reference the planet Venus. Frege examined two puzzles of Sese and Reference in his paper.

Video 25: Who Was Bertrand Russell?

*Core*: Founder of Analytic philosophy, Inventor of Type Theory, and Most influential Philosopher of the 20th Century.

*Russell*:

Bertrand Russell lived for nearly one hundred years. Throughout his life he not only made landmark accomplishments in the field of logic, but also wrote a wide range of books which made the revolutions of philosophy and science accessible to the general public. Though perhaps not the greatest philosopher of the 20th century, his work geared for all levels of readers and inspired generations of academics and easily makes him the most influential. Here is a quote from W.V.O. Quine: “I think many of us were drawn to our profession by Russell’s books. He wrote a spectrum of books for a graduated public, layman to specialist. We were beguiled by the wit and the sense of new found clarity with respect to central traits of reality”.

*Life*:

Born in 1872 in a family of liberal, atheist, British, aristocrats, Russell lost much of his close family in his first few years of life. At the age of one he lost his godfather, J.S.M., at two he lost his mother and sister, at four he lost his father and at six he lost his grandfather, the former british prime minister. This left him to be raised by his very religious Presbyterian grandmother. He contemplated suicide, and only did not follow through because of a desire to learn more mathematics. At age 18, he had denounced religion and become an atheist due in part to reading the works of his godfather. He studied at Trinity College, Cambridge where he met young G.E. Moore and an older A.N. Whitehead. While there, he married Alys Pearsal Smith (who he would later divorce) and wrote some of his most influential works including “On Denoting” and “Principia Mathematica” (whose text was so long the manuscript was carried in a wheelbarrow to the printer). As a lecturer at the University of Cambridge he met a young Wittgenstein who he thought of as a protege that would carry on his work in logic. His pacifist activities during the first world war resulted in his dismissal from academia. He was even imprisoned for arguing against US involvement in the war (though he enjoyed it as it gave him time to read and write without interruption). After the war he traveled around the world to Russia, China, Japan, and America, married and eventually divorced Dora Black, and later married Patricia Spence. Though at the beginning of the second world war he once again advocated for pacifism, he eventually changed his tune with the rise of Hitler. During this time he was appointed as a professor at City College of New York, but later dismissed because of his atheism and views on sex and marriage in his book “Marriage and Morals” (which he claims is the text that won him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950). Einstein himself defended Russell in an open letter, famously saying “Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds” Russell went on to write his bestselling book “A History of Western Philosophy”, survive a plane crash, and another divorce, remarry again (this time to Edith Finch), advocate against the USSR, for nuclear disarmament (eventually landing himself in prison again) and against the Vietnam war. Russell died of influenza in 1970 not long after publishing a three volume autobiography.

*Logic*:

Along with Alfred North Whitehead, Russell wrote one of the most influential logical texts of all time, Principia Mathematica, an attempt to fulfill the promise of logicism and reduce mathematics to logic through the use of Russell’s theory of types. It is generally considered to have failed due in part to its inability to resolve certain paradoxes such as, what would later come to be known as Russell’s paradox. This was simply the problem that the set of all sets that are not members of themselves cannot exist since it could neither be a member of itself nor not be a member of itself.

*Analytic*:

Russell was also an important influence in the founding of analytic philosophy and the rise of logical positivism. He thought that one of the principle goals of philosophy was to create a fully logical language, in which everything could be reduced to relationships between logical atoms, and we vacated inferred entities for logical constructions that could either be broken down or were themselves logical atoms.

*Language*:

Russell’s famous theory of definite descriptions offered unique solutions to puzzles which plagued the philosophy of language. By claiming that names like “Scott” were importantly different from descriptions like “The author of Waverley” Russell was able to frame statements like “The king of France is bald” to be neither nonsensical, nor needing to posit some nonexistent entity to determine their truth value, by formalizing them as there exists some x which is the king of France, and for all y if y is the king of France, y is identical to x and x is bald”. Since the first conjunct is false. We can easily come up with a truth value for such a statement.

*Politics*:

Wittgenstein, Russell’s protege, famously said that Russell’s books should be bound in two colors “those dealing with mathematical logic in red - and all students of philosophy should read them; those dealing with ethics and politics in blue - and no one should be allowed to read them”. Throughout his life, Russell was active in advocating for and against a variety of political causes, though he saw his political views as generally divorced from his philosophy. Though widespread and diverse, one of the central features of his writings was a critique of power and the unequal distribution of power throughout the world.

*Influence*:

Though perhaps not the greatest philosopher of his time, Russell was arguably the most influential due to the fact that he, like Voltaire, brought philosophy to the masses and popularized many of the concepts and arguments of his time. Equally, as a political activist he was frequently at the forefront of controversy and social change throughout his long life.

Video 26: Who Was G.E. Moore?

*Core*: father of analytic philosophy, questioner of Good, and Arch-Defender of Common Sense.

*Moore*:

Along with Russell, Wittgenstein and others, G.E. Moore is considered one of the founders of analytic philosophy. Moore was famous for critiques of idealism, skepticism, and ethical naturalism. He was a great champion of common sense philosophy, and quite influential in sense data and the philosophy of perception.

*Life*:

Born George Edward Moore in 1873, Moore hated his first and middle names. His professional colleagues called him Moore, while his wife referred to him as Bill. His father was the physician and author George Moore and his brother was the poet and author Thomas Sturge Moore. In his youth, Moore was interested in the puzzles of philosophy far more than the mysteries of science. He was fascinated that philosophy had failed to defend the most basic of commonly held beliefs like the belief in the external world. He became a fellow at Cambridge where he met Bertrand Russell and John McTaggart Elis Mctaggart. He would stay studying and later working at Cambridge for most of the rest of his life. Along with Russell and Wittgentstein he would make Cambridge into one of the greatest locations for philosophy in the world at the time. He died in 1958 and was cremated in Cambridge.

*Realism*:

Moore fought valiantly for common sense notions of reality against the positions of idealism and skepticism. One of his most famous arguments offered in his “Proof of an External World” was holding up his hands and saying this is one hand, this is another, therefore external objects exist. In this case he was actually arguing against the metaphysical position of idealism (that everything is mental). He claimed that all versions of the claim “to be is to be perceived” were either false or tautologous. Elsewhere he did offer a very similar argument against skepticism, which turned the classic academic skepticism argument on its head. He agreed with the premise that if we are in a skeptical scenario then we cannot know that there is a hand in front of our face, but he said we do know that there is a hand in front of our face therefore we can conclude via Modus Tollens that we are not in a skeptical scenario.

*Analysis*:

If philosophers were not to be engaged in endless debate over the nature of reality or how we can show what we know, what were they to do? In Moore’s view, a central element of philosophy should be the analysis of propositions. This focus on solving isolated problems through conceptual analysis in philosophy instead of building a full all encompassing theory would serve as a central pillar of analytic philosophy and survive much longer than any of Moore’s individual theories.

*Question*:

Moore was also very influential in the realm of ethics, challenging the idea that morality is a natural phenomenon through the use of his open question argument. Basically this argument claimed that if good was natural, if we had a way to actually define good, it would be a barren tautology which would not give us new information, simply define a word. However, since all of the ethical theories would cause us to have a different understanding of what is good and cause us to act differently than we can normally do, the good cannot be natural. This argument continues to be an influential one in meta ethical theory to this day.

Video 27: Who Was Ludwig Wittgenstein?

*Core*: Father of the Vienna Circle, drive of the Linguistic Turn and Greatest Philosopher of the 20th century.

*Wittgenstein*:

Wittgenstein is considered by many to be the greatest philosopher of the 20th century, and by some to be the greatest mind since Immanuel Kant. Along with Moore and Russell he was one of the fathers of Analytic Philosophy. He only ever published one book during his life, where he claimed to solve all the problems of philosophy. He made significant contributions to Logic, and Philosophy of Language which are still relevant today.

*Life*:

Born in 1889 in Vienna to a wealthy family, Wittgenstein originally pursued an education in engineering, but was led by an interest in pure mathematics to met and work with Gottlob Frege who recommended that he go to Cambridge and study logic with Bertrand Russell (who was wary of him at first, but eventually took him on as a protege claiming that wittgenstein might solve some of the puzzles Russell was too old to). He only spent two years at Cambridge, before isolating himself in Norway until World War 1. He fought in the war and was eventually imprisoned. During the war he worked on the only book he would publish in his lifetime. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, which was published after the war. In this book, Wittgenstein claimed to have solved all of the problems of philosophy and therefore he looked to other pursuits such as gardening, architecture , teaching and would later work as a hospital porter during WWII. He gave his inheritance away to his siblings (three of who committed suicide). After around a decade he returned to Cambridge (having discussed some of his ideas with the Vienna circle) where he developed new ideas which would be published posthumously in Philosophical Investigation and other works. He died of prostate cancer in 1951.

*Tractatus*:

In his first book, Tractatus, Wittgenstein claims to solve all of the problems of philosophy through the philosophy of language. This “turn” towards language represented a major shift in philosophical thought. It is made through the claim that the most basic elements of the world are not objects, but rather facts or states of affairs. Propositions and thoughts are pictures in one’s head. These pictures are made true by corresponding to facts. The elements of a picture each correspond isomorphically to the object in the fact or state of affairs. And the relations in the proposition correspond to the way the state of affairs is arranged. Wittgenstein also divides language into three categories, sense, lacking sense, and nonsense. If a proposition does not have some fact or picture of the world that it corresponds to, then it lacks sense or it is nonsense, this means that the statements of logic, lack sense, and are only given truth values by convention. Propositions about ethics, aesthetics and anything else which does not have a clear fact in the world which it corresponds to are as meaningless as “Russell is identical”. This goes for mathematical claims like “five is a number” and even metaphysical claims like “objects exist”. Basically Wittgenstein said that it was nonsense to even try to talk about these things, relegating much of philosophy to the garbage. Instead of these pursuits, philosophers should engage in critiques of language and clarification of thoughts. Philosophy should not be perceived as a doctrine so much as an activity to be engaged in. Since much of the Tractatus is statements which are now declared to be nonsense, Wittgenstein claims it is a ladder which we must use to see the world, but after doing so we must get rid of that ladder, since we have learned it is meaningless. There are many different conflicting interpretations of this book, including Russell’s interpretation which he wrote in the preface to the book (but Wittgenstein disagreed with).

*Investigations*:

Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein’s second most famous book, was published posthumously along with much of his later work. It represents a very different perspective. It reconceives philosophy as a therapy, instead of a critique. HE claimed that language was actually a set of games that followed particular rules. Meanings of words are dependent on their use, and the language games that they are being used in. In other words, given different contexts a single word may have different uses and therefore mean different things. Language games include things like telling a joke, making up a story or making up and testing a hypothesis. What determines the rules of these games and the use of these words is a common shared experience. Grammar is not an external system of rules, but how we play the language game. He preferred the concept of family resemblance between words when offering definitions to the commonly uxdc necessary and sufficient conditions.

*Beetle*:

This idea of “no private language” is best illustrated in Wittgenstein’s famous experiment involving a beetle. Imagine everyone has a box, and inside that box they have something that they call a beetle. No one can see anyone else’s beetle, but they can talk meaningfully about beetles and use the word. The point is that the meaning of the beetle is not dependent on what is actually in anyone’s box, it is dependent on how we use it. In other words, even if I see the background of this video as the color that you would call green, it does not mean that I am mistaken when I call it red, since the meaning of the word red does not depend on what I see, but rather the public use of the word.

Video 28: Who Was Saul Kripke?

*Core*: Prodigy Logician, Master of Modal Language, and Greatest Living Philosopher.

*Kripke*:

Though there are certainly more popular or well known living philosophers than Kripke this may be in part because his contributions are at a high level which many laymen might not understand. Kripke’s monumental work in Logic, Philosophy of Language, Modality, and Truth puts him above the rest, particularly in the analytic philosophy tradition.

*Life*:

Born in 1940 in Long Island New York, the child of a rabbi and a Jewish Children’s book author Saul Kripke fit the definition of a prodigy perfectly. It is said that at the age of 6 he taught himself ancient Hebrew, by nine had read all of Shakespeare and was on to Descartes by the time he finished elementary school. He wrote the first of many papers which would transform the field of modal logic before he graduated high school. The paper was so influential that it got him an invitation to teach in the mathematics department at Harvard. As the story goes Kripke wrote back saying that his mom thought he should finish high school first. While obtaining an undergraduate mathematics degree at Harvard, Kripke taught graduate level logic courses at MIT in his spare time. Kripke would go on to teach at Harvard, Rockefeller University, and after giving a lecture series at Princeton called “Naming and Necessity” would go on to teach there years later. He is currently a Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the City University of New York.

*Modal Logic*:

Kripke’s impact on modal logic was so monumental that the most basic axiom of modal logic is named axiom K after Saul Kripke. The standard semantics for all modal logics is known as Kripke Semantics. Effectively he provided a framework of meaning for statements about possibility and necessity, but also other types of modal logics, such as temporal logic, deontic logic, and epistemic logic. Simply a statement is possible if there is some possible world accessible to this one for which that statement is true.

*Truth*:

Kripke was also very influential with his theory of truth which improved on the work of Alfred Tarski by calling truth a partially defined predicate, and therefore eliminating the need for a hierarchy of truth predicates. While some problems of the Linear’s Revenge are still present in this theory, it certainly did away with a number of the counterintuitive aspects of Tarski’s theory of truth.

*Wittgenstein*:

Kripke also contributed a particularly influential reading of Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations. Kripke admitted that the views he offers in that paper probably do not represent those of Wittgenstein, nor do they represent those of Kripke himself, however they do represent an influential skeptical argument against interpretation and meaning, therefore these views are often colloquially referred to as being offered by kripkenstein. The disagreement in interpretation revolves around whether Wittgenstein is claiming that his rule following paradox is veridical or falsidical (or to put it in human terms, if it admits of a skeptical solution or a straight one). Kripke claimed the paradox was veridical.

*Language*:

Possibly Kripke’s most famous contribution to philosophy came in the form of a series of lectures that he gave at Princeton which were later published known as “Naming and Necessity”. As the title suggests, these lectures focused on the applications of names and rigid designators across possible worlds. He argued against the descriptivist positions (that names are just descriptions) offered by Russell and Wittgenstein. And instead claimed that names can pick out a person across possible worlds regardless of description. In these lectures he also argued that there may be a posteriori necessary truths, facts which are true in all worlds, but can only be learned through experience. These are generally statements which claim that two names refer to the same object, such as “The Morning star is the Evening star”. According to Kripke these names refer to the same object in all possible worlds. So this statement is necessarily true, but you need experience to learn that both refer to Venus.