**Socrates**

Socrates was the first of the great Athenian philosophers. Though he left no writings of his own behind, what we know of his ideas comes from the writings of his students, one of whom was Plato. Socrates taught many students, but he accepted no payment for this. He believed that the goal of education was only to improve the individual.

Socrates taught his students using a series of questions known as the **Socratic method**, starting with basic questions and progressing to more complex ones. It was designed to lead his pupils to see things for themselves by using their own reasoning. Socrates believed that all real knowledge is already present within each person. Only critical examination is needed to call it forth.

Socrates was also known for questioning authority, and was eventually accused and convicted by the Athenians for corrupting the youth of Athens by teaching them to question and think for themselves. An Athenian jury sentenced him to die by drinking hemlock, a poison.

**Plato**

One of Socrates’ students, Plato is considered one of the greatest philosophers in Western civilization. He was fascinated by the question of reality. How do we know what is real?

According to Plato, a higher world of eternal, unchanging Forms has always existed. These ideal Forms make up reality and only a trained mind – the goal of philosophy – can become aware of or understand these forms. To Plato, the objects that we perceive with our senses (trees, for example) are simply reflections of the ideal Forms (treeness). The trees are shadows of the ultimate reality, the Form of treeness.

After the way Athens treated Socrates, Plato viewed democracy with a sense of distrust. He explained his ideas on government in his work, *The Republic.* To Plato, individuals could not achieve a good life unless they lived in a just and rational state. His search for the just state led him to construct an ideal state in which people were divided into three basic groups. At the top was an upper-class of philosopher-kings, wise leaders that directed society. Next were warriors, responsible for protecting the society. The third group was the masses, people not driven by wisdom or courage, but by desires. They would be the producers of society – artisans, tradespeople, and farmers.

**Aristotle**

Aristotle was a student of Plato at his school the Academy. He disagreed with Plato about the nature of reality, rejecting Plato’s theory of ideal forms. While he agreed that by examining individual objects (trees) we could perceive their form (treeness), he did not agree that these forms existed in a separate, higher world of reality. Instead, the form (treeness) was a part of the things (trees).

His main interest, was analyzing and classifying things based on observation and investigation. He wrote about many subjects, including ethics, logic, politics, poetry, astronomy, geology, biology, and physics. Until the Scientific Revolution in the 16th century, science in the Western world was based on Aristotle’s ideas.

Like Plato, Aristotle wanted an effective form of government that would rationally direct human affairs. He tried to find this by analyzing existing styles of government. For his work *Politics*, Aristotle looked at the constitutions of 158 states and found three good forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy, and constitutional government. Of those three, he favored constitutional government as the best form for most people.

**Herodotus**

Considered the first historian, Herodotus was the author of *History of the Persian Wars*, one of the first historical writings in Western civilization. The central theme of this work is the conflict between the Greeks and the Persian, which Herodotus viewed as a struggle between Greek freedom and Persian despotism. Herodotus traveled widely and questioned many people as a means of obtaining his information. He was a master storyteller.

**Thucydides**

Many historians today consider Thucydides the greatest historian of the ancient world. After he was defeated while serving as a Athenian general in the Peloponnesian War, he was exiled from Athens. During his exile, he wrote *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides saw war and politics in human terms, rather than something influenced by divine forces. He explained the causes and the course of the Peloponnesian War clearly and fairly, placing much emphasis on the accuracy of his facts. Thucydides also provided remarkable insight into the human condition. He believed that the study of history is of great value to understanding the present.

**Greek Art**

Modern man often judges his architecture in terms of how functional it is; the ancient Greeks judged a building in terms of its beauty. Athenian citizens diligently cultivated a sense of beauty. Athens expected every citizen to contribute to the arts by creating an artistic work or by giving money to support an artist, build a temple, or finance a play.

On top of the Acropolis of Athens stood the Parthenon, a temple in honor of Athena. Begun in 447 BCE, it is considered the finest example of Greek architecture. The beauty of the Parthenon lay not in its great size but in its pleasing proportions--the relation of length to width, and of both to height. Though the Parthenon is almost as large as a football field, its basic qualities are harmony and proportion.

The greatest Greek art was sculpture. Greek sculptures tried to represent the details of the human body with complete accuracy. It glorified man as the most important creature in the universe. The faces and figures of women represented the Greek ideal of female beauty; images of men suggested ideal traits admired by the Greeks--strength, intelligence, pride, grace, and courage. All Greek art, whether architecture, painting, or sculpture, expressed the Greek ideals of harmony, balance, order, and moderation--the qualities of simplicity and restraint.

**Aristarchus**

Aristarchus was an astronomer who developed the theory that the sun is at the center of the universe while the Earth rotates around the sun in a circular orbit. However, his theories were not widely accepted at the time, and most still believed that the Earth was at the center of the universe.

**Erosthanes**

Erosthanes was an astronomer who determined that the Earth was round. He also used basic geometry to calculate Earth’s circumference at 24,675 miles. His calculations were remarkably accurate – within 185 miles of the actual circumference.

**Archimedes**

Archimedes is the most famous scientist of the Hellenistic period. He used physics to explain the principle of the lever. He also designed many innovative machines capable of lifting fully-loaded ships out of the water and setting ships on fire using an array of mirrors. He is also generally considered to be one of the greatest mathematicians of all time because of his work on the geometry of spheres and cylinders as well as for establishing the value of the mathematical constant pi.

**Epicureanism**

Founded by the philosopher Epicurus, Epicureans believed that happiness was the goal of life. The means to achieve happiness was the pursuit of pleasure, the only true good. Epicurus believed that pleasure was the freedom from emotional turmoil and worry. To achieve this, people had to free themselves from public activity, especially participation in the government. Instead, they should focus on the ideal of friendship to live a complete life.

**Stoicism**

Stoicism would become the most popular philosophy of the Hellenistic world, and would have a tremendous impact on the Roman Empire as well. Founded by a philosopher named Zeno, stoicism believed that happiness could be found only when people gained inner peace by living in harmony with the will of God. Unlike Epicureans, Stoics did not believe in the need to separate themselves from the world and politics. Public service was regarded as noble, and the true Stoic was a good citizen.