

Chronological List of Some Major Philosophers

c.620-546 BC Thales of Miletus: pre-Socratic philosopher who sought rational explanations for natural phenomena and for unifying principles to explain reality

c.551-479 BC Confucius: Chinese philosopher whose teachings are preserved in the *Analects*, his writing focussed on ethical and social questions including social values and obligations, rituals, education, politics, family and the virtuous life

c.515-469 BC Parmenides: known as the first metaphysical philosopher, he made 'being' the centre of philosophical enquiry

c.469-399 BC Socrates: changed the way people thought by encouraging students in reflection and self-reflection through systematic questioning; introduced concern for the soul and mind and prioritized ethics

c.428-347 BC Plato: famous for his theories on knowledge and reality based on Forms ('Ideas') and for his Socratic dialogues, including his political work, *The Republic*

384-322 BC Aristotle: reflected critically on his teacher Plato's work, and made lasting contributions to metaphysics, anthropology and ethics

354-430 Augustine: early Christian philosopher influenced by Neoplatonism; wrote on scepticism, the problem of evil, divine foreknowledge and free will, and the relationship between religion and the state

480-524 Boethius: written in prison during the collapse of the Roman Empire in Western Europe, his work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, proposes philosophical responses to the problem of evil, free will and divine foreknowledge

740-804 Alcuin: cleric and scholar, a key figure in the revival of learning during the Carolingian Renaissance, fostering study of the liberal arts in early medieval Europe

980-1037 Avicenna (Ibn Sina): Aristotelian physician and philosopher, one of the most influential medieval Islamic philosophers

1126-1198 Averroes (Ibn Rushd): Islamic philosopher whose exposition of Aristotelian texts helped reintroduce Aristotle's work to the West; wrote on the eternity of the world, the soul, and the relationship between faith and reason

1135-1204 Maimonides: Jewish medieval philosopher and physician whose Aristotelian philosophy influenced Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus

1033-1109 Anselm: Philosopher and theologian; devised the Ontological Argument for the existence of God and responded to the question 'why did God become man?'

1079-1142 Abelard: scholastic and early nominalist; argued the importance of sound philosophical reasoning for theology, wrote on logic, metaphysics and ethics, and recounted his controversial personal life in *The History of My Calamities*.

1206-1280 Albert the Great: Dominican scholastic philosopher and theologian, revered for his breadth of knowledge. Key figure in the reception of Greek Aristotelian philosophy, via Islamic philosophers, to Christian scholars, synthesising Greek, Arabic and Christian philosophical traditions.

1221-1274 Bonaventure: Franciscan philosopher and theologian who followed a Neoplatonic Augustinian approach to the relationship between faith and reason

1225-1274 Aquinas: Dominican scholastic philosopher, theologian and saint, who influenced subsequent western thought through his synthesis of faith and reason, philosophy and theology, his most famous work being the *Summa Theologiae*.

1266-1308 Duns Scotus: Scottish Franciscan philosopher and theologian, taught on the nature of the will, proposed an ontological argument for God's existence, defended the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

1285-1349 Ockham: controversial English Franciscan known for his philosophical, theological and political writings, and the methodological principle 'Ockham's Razor'. His nominalism influenced the decline of scholasticism and metaphysics.

1588-1679 Hobbes: British mechanist philosopher known for his materialistic, deterministic and pessimistic account of human nature and politics.

1596-1650 Descartes: besides important contributions to mathematics and science, he is known for his dualism, method of radical doubt in epistemology, and solution to skepticism, 'cogito ergo sum'. Sometimes referred to as the 'father of modern philosophy'

1632-1677 Spinoza: monistic philosopher who equated God with nature, critiqued popular religion, commented on Descartes, and supported political religious toleration

1632-1704 Locke: British philosopher best known for his political philosophy based on majority rule and his epistemology characterized by emphasis on empirical knowledge

1685-1753 Berkeley: Irish clergyman known for his devastating critique of Locke's theory of ideas and for proposing from strict empirical principles that only minds exist

1711-1776 Hume: Scottish philosopher whose skepticism concerning human knowledge and morality was an important influence on Kant and the logical positivists

1712-1778 Rousseau: paradigmatic figure of the Age of Enlightenment, Rousseau's views on political philosophy and freedom were influential during this period.

1724-1804 Kant: worked out the most influential philosophical program of the modern era, including lasting contributions in ethics and his central thesis that the mind has an active structuring role in all human knowledge

1779-1831 Hegel: idealist who criticized the traditional distinction of object from subject and proposed an historical account of the development of consciousness from sensation, to ethics, to purer forms of consciousness of the World-Spirit in art, religion and philosophy

1788-1860 Schopenhauer: German philosopher influenced by Kant who held that we are manifestations of our egotistic wills

1806-1873 Mill: empiricist philosopher known for his utilitarian theory of ethics and political philosophy

1813-1855 Kierkegaard: father of existentialist thought who emphasized the individual, the importance of subjectivity, and made profound contributions to religious thought

1818-1883 Marx: proposed a materialistic philosophy in which class struggle was the driving force of history

1842-1910 James: American pragmatist thinker who developed a pragmatic account of truth and made important contributions to philosophy of religion

1844-1900 Nietzsche: German romantic thinker who challenged traditional ethics and religion and made lasting contributions to the modern world view

1859-1938 Husserl: founder of philosophical phenomenology and a major contributor to thinking on the mind, consciousness and the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity

1872-1970 Russell: logician and philosopher known for his ground-breaking contributions to formal logic, and his application of logical analysis to philosophical problems

1882-1973 Maritain: French philosopher influenced by Aquinas, who made contributions in the fields of metaphysics, epistemology, political philosophy, natural theology and philosophy of religion, and aesthetics.

1884-1978 Gilson: French Neo-Scholastic and neo-Thomist philosopher influential in the revival of medieval philosophy and metaphysics

1889-1951 Wittgenstein: began by arguing that language relates to reality through propositions picturing facts, then repudiated this and proposed a theory of language as game and meaning as social usage

1889-1976 Heidegger: German thinker who transformed phenomenology by placing the concept of being, not consciousness, at centre stage, and undertaking important work on the nature and place in the world of human beings

1906-1980 Sartre: French existentialist philosopher, famous for his analysis of consciousness, description of conscious experience and criticism of Freud

1910-1989 Ayer: English analytical philosopher who absorbed the Logical Positivism popular in Vienna and taught a less extreme version of analytical philosophy

1919-2001 Anscombe: English philosopher who edited and translated much of Wittgenstein's work and made major contributions to the study of Aristotle and of Catholic philosophical thought

1930- 2004 Derrida: French postmodernist, founder of deconstructionism and a major social critic, often misunderstood and less extreme in his views than some of his contemporary interpreters