

## An exposition of the characteristics of classical Greek philosophy

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**Abstract :** Philosophy as a discipline has an historical perspective. In the case of the ..... Greek philosophy the period commences with Thales of the seventh century B.C. and ends with Aristotle in the fourth century B.C. This period exhibits certain definite characteristics which were based on the following four presuppositions which were based on the following four presuppositions; namely, a particular attitude towards reality; the cosmos as a totality; the nature of life; and the idea of the constant. These constitute the subject of this article.

**Keywords:** presuppositions, cosmos, reality, totality and constant.

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### I. Introduction

The classical Greek philosophy exhibits certain definite characteristics that are based on four presuppositions which form the subject this article.

#### **Purpose of the article**

The express purpose of this article is to give a concise exposition of the four identifiable characteristics of classical Greek philosophy.

#### **Concise exposition of the characteristics of classical Greek philosophy**

A concise exposition of the characteristics of the classical Greek philosophy demonstrates that the period of classical Greek philosophy commences with Thales (seventh century B.C) and ends with Aristotle (fourth century B.C). This period exhibits certain characteristics which form the subject of this discussion

What then are the characteristics of the philosophy of the classical period, and on what presuppositions is that philosophy based?

#### **Answers**

Four presuppositions form the characteristics of classical Greek philosophy.

#### **A particular attitude towards reality**

The aim is not to change the world but to know reality. The ancient Greeks highly esteemed an inquiring mind. Knowledge is man's reflection of nature and knowledge is an end for its own sake. Augustine (354-430AD) says empiricism is a method that seeks knowledge through. Empiricism attempts to discover interrelatedness between sensory impressions. For the empiricist ideas begin with sensory experience. By rational induction they are transformed into empirical knowledge. Human reason is capable of revealing the truth.

#### **The Cosmos is conceived as a totality**

- (a) The classical Greek philosopher poses questions concerning phenomena as a totality and not questions concerning separate phenomena. His problems relate to the whole not to particular parts of it.
- (b) The whole or total reality or totality is conceived as a Cosmos that is an orderly whole. There is no chaos. The Cosmos is a non chaotic, orderly total reality.
- (c) The Cosmos is bounded in space and time.
- (d) Reality reflects an organizing spirit.

#### **The nature of life**

The nature of life is not strife and chaos, but *tranquility and equilibrium*. The very canon of Greek life and thought is *harmony*.

#### **The idea of the constant**

The Greeks valued the constant, the independent, the static, the invariable, the unchanging, and they took a conceptual approach to understanding it. Because of the Greek conceptual and methodological approach, logic and geometry, which are formal or conceptual sciences par excellence, were developed and flourished in the Greek thought. The Greek love of the constant is well mirrored in Plato's conception of "Ideas" as external and invariable.

#### **How and what then philosophy was considered to be?**

Amongst the ancient Greek philosophers, Aristotle (384-322 B.C) regarded philosophy as *the theoretical study of ultimate reality*: the study of the most comprehensive and most fundamental principles of all existing things.

In contrast to Aristotle, the Stoics regarded philosophy as a practical discipline: the main task of the philosopher was to teach us how to organize our lives in an intelligibly meaningful way.

*In the modern period, by philosophy we mean a rational attempt by man to pose, and determine the validity of, both problems and solutions pertaining to a world-view and a view of life.*

An analysis of this definition of philosophy includes these concepts:

- a. a rational attempt;
- b. pose and determine validity;
- c. problems and solutions;
- d. world – view; and
- e. view of life

## II. Conclusion

In conclusion the classical Greeks valued the constant, the independent, the static, the invariable, the unchanging, and they took a conceptual approach to understanding it because of the Greek conceptual methodological approach, logic and geometry, which are formal or conceptual sciences par excellence, were developed and flourished in the Greek thought. The Greek love of the constant is well mirrored in Plato's conception of "Ideas" as eternal [eternity] and invariable [invariability].

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