



A History of Western Thought Why We Think the Way We Do

Summer 2016

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Catchy modern sayings ...

“That may be true for you, but it isn’t true for me.”

“It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you believe it with your whole heart.”

“My will determines my reality.”

“It all depends on what you mean by that (*or* how you define that).”

“The end justifies the means.”

“Don’t sweat the small stuff; it’s all small stuff.”

“Question authority.”

What are we really saying?



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Words matter, because words reflect thoughts; and how we think matters, because our thoughts directly affect our actions.

We all have a **WORLDVIEW** – our overall point-of-view about life; how we see and understand the world.

Most of us assume our worldview is the correct one; that our perspective is the only one that really makes sense and is correct.

But are we **RIGHT** in this assumption?



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Subjective relativism. Truth, meaning and morality are not absolutes, but are relative and subjective; belief is all that matters and all beliefs are equally true; no one has the right to tell me what is right or what I should do; nothing ultimately matters anyway.



What are we really saying?

“If it feels good, do it.”

“Seeing is believing.”

Materialism. We are just animals; the physical world is all that exists; pleasure dictates morality; reality is based on sense experience.

“A mind is a terrible thing to waste.”

“Knowledge is power.”

Rationalism. Reason is the only valid source for truth or knowledge, so the most important part of any person is her mind.

“He who dies with the most toys wins.”

“Living well is the best revenge.”

Commercialism. Life is measured in economic terms; my value is defined by what I have.



What are we really saying?

“Carpe diem.” (“Seize the day.”)

“Better to burn out than to fade away.”

“Life fast, die young, leave a beautiful corpse.”

Temporalism. Youth is everything; now is all you've got.

“Life is hard and then you die.”

“Whatever can go wrong, will.”

Nihilism (despair). Nothing has meaning; everything is hopeless.

“That may have been true for our parents, but not now.”

“Don't be so old-fashioned.”

Chronocentrism. Today is better than yesterday; human progress and perfection is inevitable.





So...

What's the question?



We no longer know where our ideas come from or what they mean; we no longer think critically; and we no longer know how to determine what is real, what is true, or what is good.

- **How do we know what is real?**
- **How do we know what is true?**
- **How do we know what is good?**

“We have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.” Alasdair MacIntyre

How have we gotten so confused?



- ◆ **We have lost the ability to think critically about the things in our lives.**
- ◆ **Dogma begets ethics. How we think & what we believe controls how we act.**
- ◆ What we are experiencing in Western culture is the result of a long-term process – at least 350 years – that has changed and shaped how we think and believe.
- ◆ We need to identify the ways of thinking that has brought our culture into trouble, to learn where the dominant ideas came from in order to understand them better, and to determine what we should think and how we should act.



- How do we know what is real?
- How do we know what is true?
- How do we know what is good?

A History of Western Thought

Lecture Schedule

- ◆ August 12 – **Intro/Faith** (Plato, Aristotle; Augustine; Aquinas)
- ◆ August 19 – **Reason** (Descartes, Locke, Hume)
- ◆ August 26 – **Experience** (Kant, Schleiermacher)
- ◆ September 2 – **Process** (Hegel, Marx, Darwin, Whitehead)
- ◆ September 9 – NO LECTURE
- ◆ September 16 – **Will** (Machiavelli, James, Nietzsche)
- ◆ September 23 – **Meaning & Meaninglessness**
(Wittgenstein; Logical Positivists; Derrida)
- ◆ September 30 – **Where Do We Go From Here?**



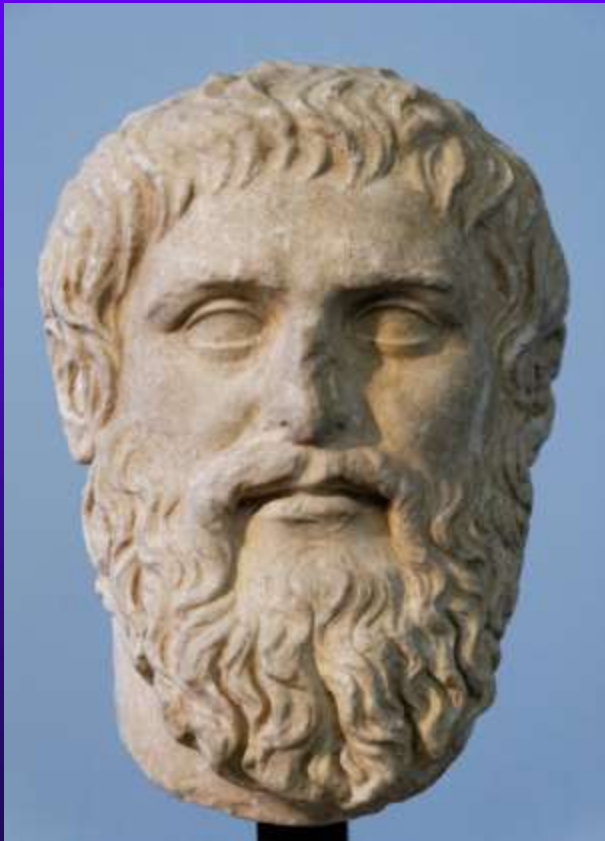
Historical divisions of Western philosophy

- **Classical philosophy** (600 BC-AD 400) – beginnings of Western philosophy. Classical Greek and Roman philosophers look at universe in wonder and ponder its origin & nature. Notably Socrates, Plato, Aristotle.
- **Medieval philosophy** (400-1400 AD) –the Church was dominant and philosophy expressed Christian understanding of the world. Notably Augustine, Aquinas, Anselm, Duns Scotus, William of Occam.
- **Renaissance and into modern era** (1500-1900 AD) – knowledge exploded; science & reason became supreme methods of discovery and knowledge. Notably Pascal, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard.
- **Contemporary philosophy** (1901 thru today) – most diverse; many different philosophical movements and perspectives. Notably James, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, Searle and Plantinga.



Plato (427-347 BC)

- *One of most important Classical Greek philosophers, influential in philosophy, science, mathematics, political philosophy, religion and spirituality .
- *Founder of Academy in Athens, 1st Western institution of higher learning.
- *Student of Socrates; teacher of Aristotle.



Faith – Leading up to the Modern World

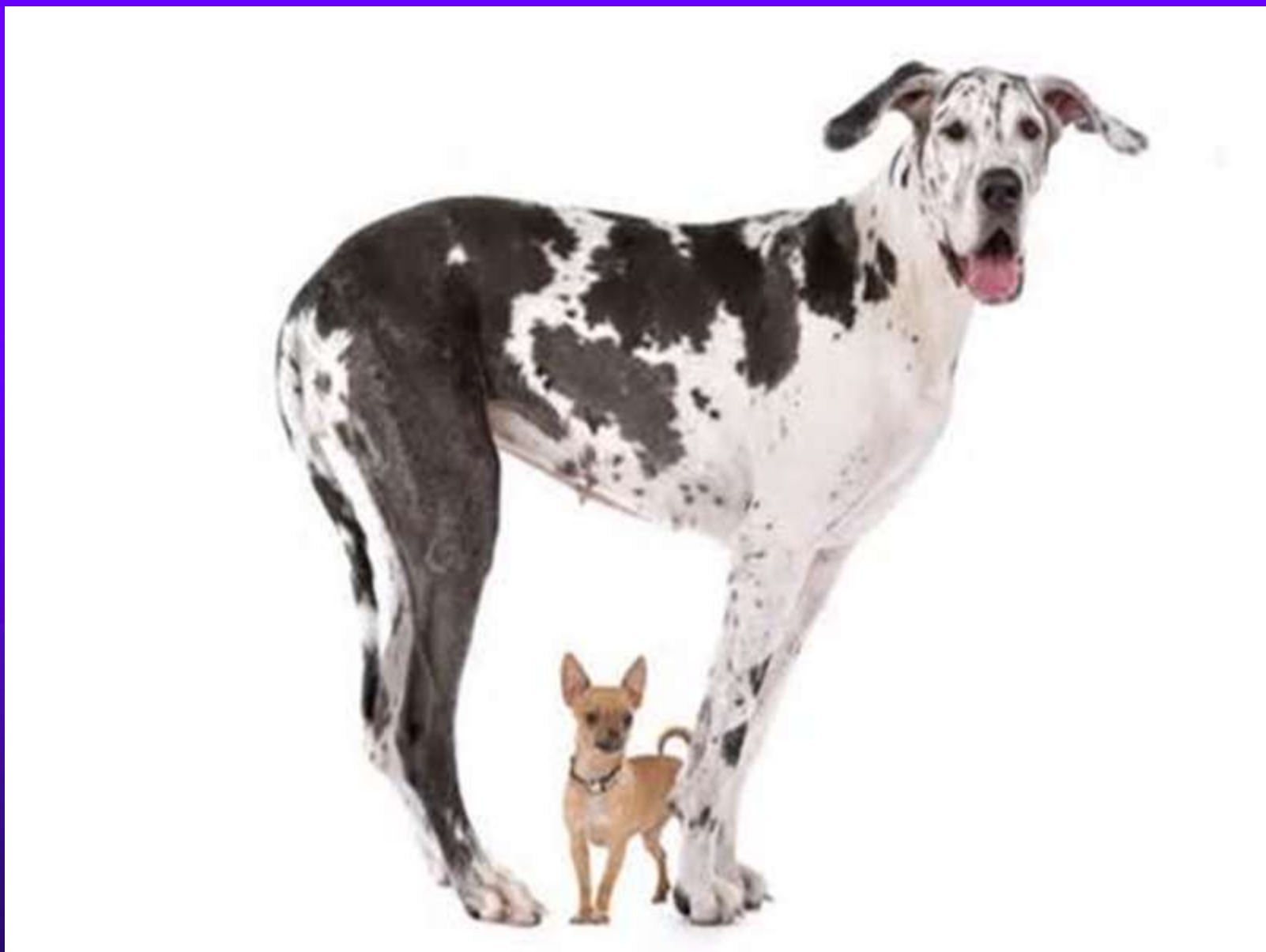
Idealism

“Mathematician/Poets”

Plato (c.427-347 BC)

- ◆ Mathematician/philosopher
- ◆ Distrusted the senses
- ◆ “Ideal” forms in the mind of God
- ◆ Good is the highest good
- ◆ “All since are footnotes to Plato”

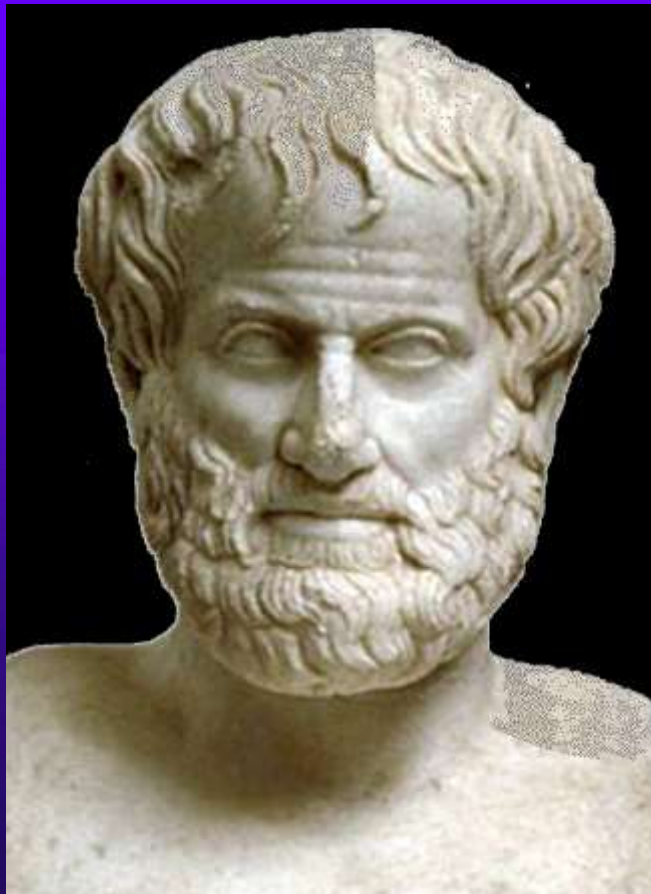






Aristotle (384-322 BC)

- *Credited with earliest study of formal logic, plus ethics, science, metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, more.
- *Known as “The Philosopher.” and (in Islam) as “The First Teacher.”
- *Student of Plato; teacher of Alexander the Great.



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Materialism

“Scientists/Politicians”

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- ◆ Scientist/philosopher
- ◆ Form found in matter
- ◆ Sense experience is critical
- ◆ Happiness is highest good
- ◆ “The Philosopher”



St. Augustine (354-430 AD)

- *Bishop of Hippo in North Africa.
- *Early Latin Church Father & perhaps Christianity's greatest theologian.
- *Prolific author, especially of *Confessions* and *City of God*.
- *Inventor of idea of Christendom following fall of the Roman Empire.



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- ◆ Neo-Platonic Christian theologian
- ◆ *Faith comes before Reason*
- ◆ His theology dominated for 900 years



St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

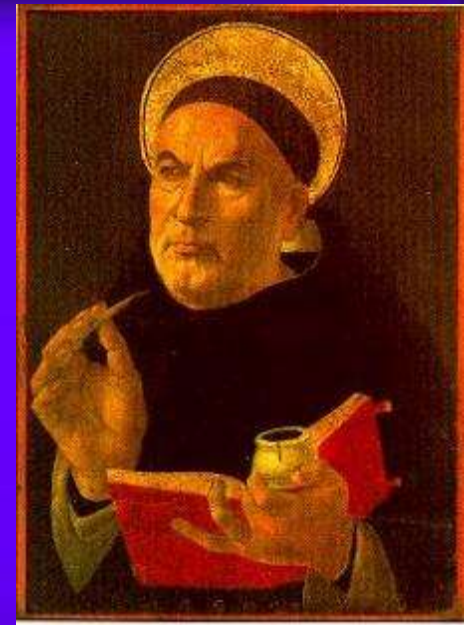
- * The pivotal thinker in Western philosophy
- * Angelic Doctor, Prince of Scholastics, Universal Teacher, Great Synthesizer, The Dumb Ox
- * Author of 80 works

Life

- 1225 – born near Aquino, Italy
- 1243 – joined Dominican order after family opposition
- 1256 – doctorate/ philosophy prof. at U. of Paris
- 1265-1273 – *Summa Theologica*
- 1274 – dies in Fossanova, on way to Council of Lyon
- 1323 – canonized by Pope John XXII
- 1567 – declared a Doctor of the Church
- 1879 – Leo XIII declares Thomism basis of RC schools
- 1950 – Pius XII affirms Thomism as guide to RC doctrine

The Five Proofs for God

- 1) The Argument from Motion
- 2) The Causation of Existence
- 3) Contingent and Necessary Objects
- 4) The Argument from Degrees and Perfection
- 5) The Argument from Intelligent Design



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