

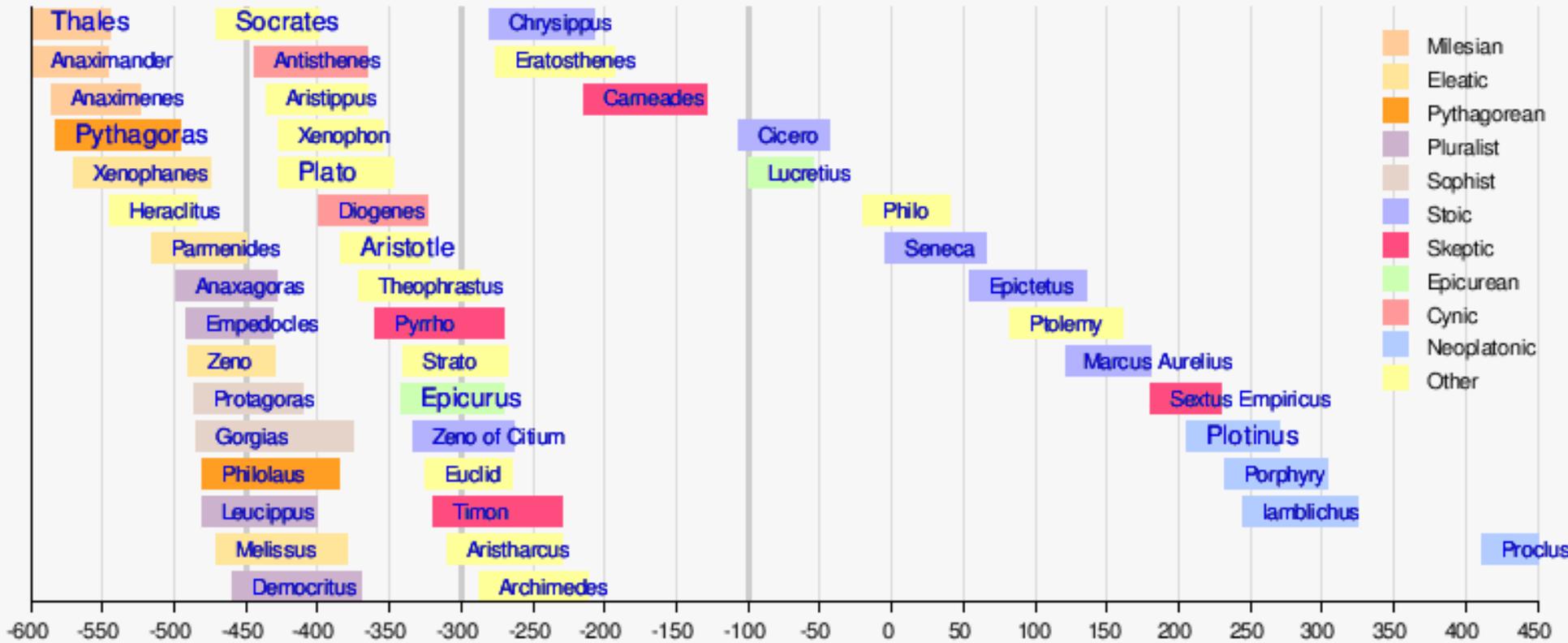
PLATO

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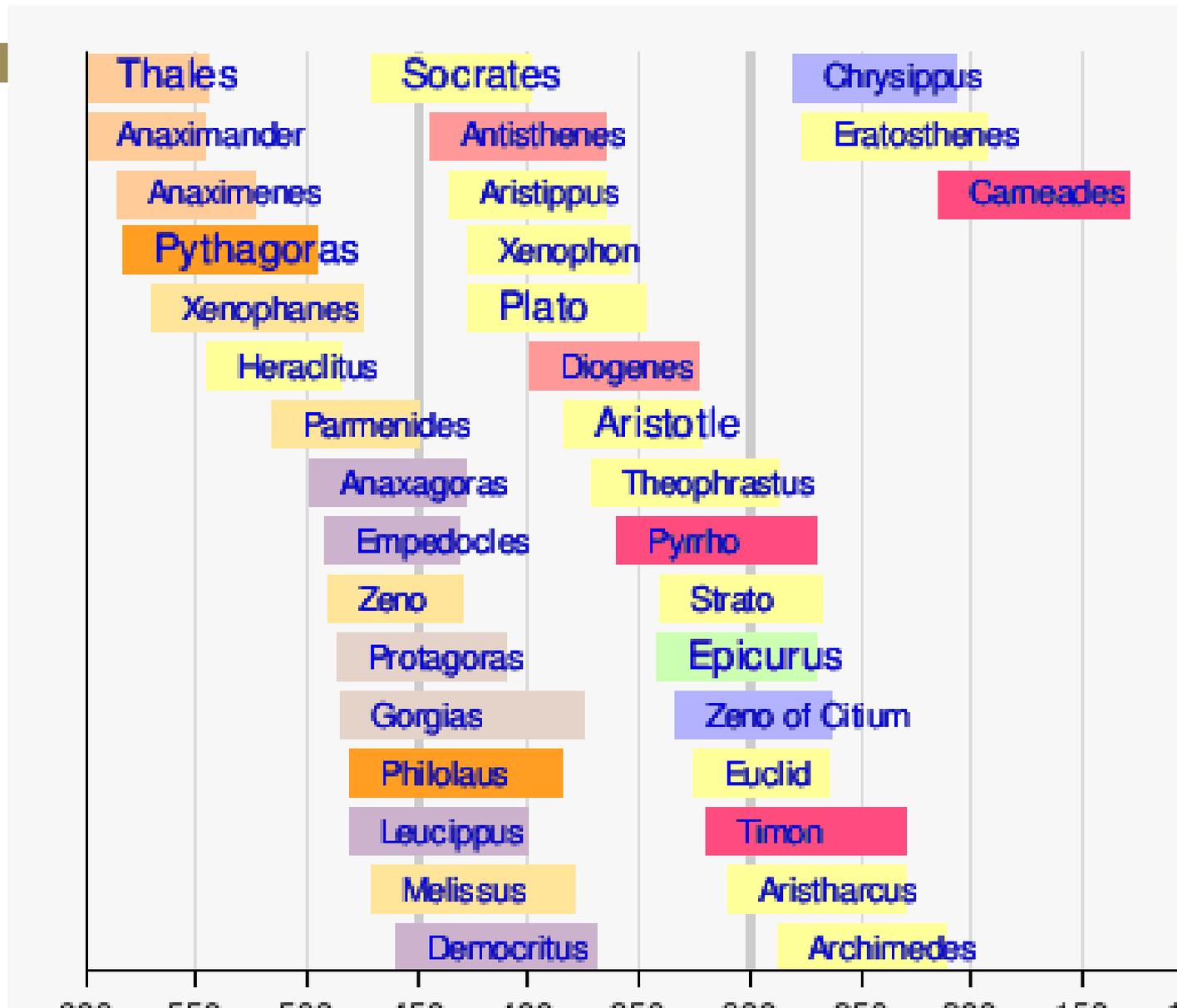
Gentrain

17 October 2018

Timeline of Ancient Greek Philosophy



Timeline of Ancient Greek Philosophy



The importance of Plato

- Plato and Aristotle most influential of all philosophers
 - Plato had a great effect Christian theology and philosophy until 13th century
 - Aristotle was the product of Plato, though his philosophy differed greatly
- Born 428 BCE to aristocratic family

Plato, Seneca, and Aristotle from *Devotional and Philosophical Writings*, c. 1330



Plato's Thought

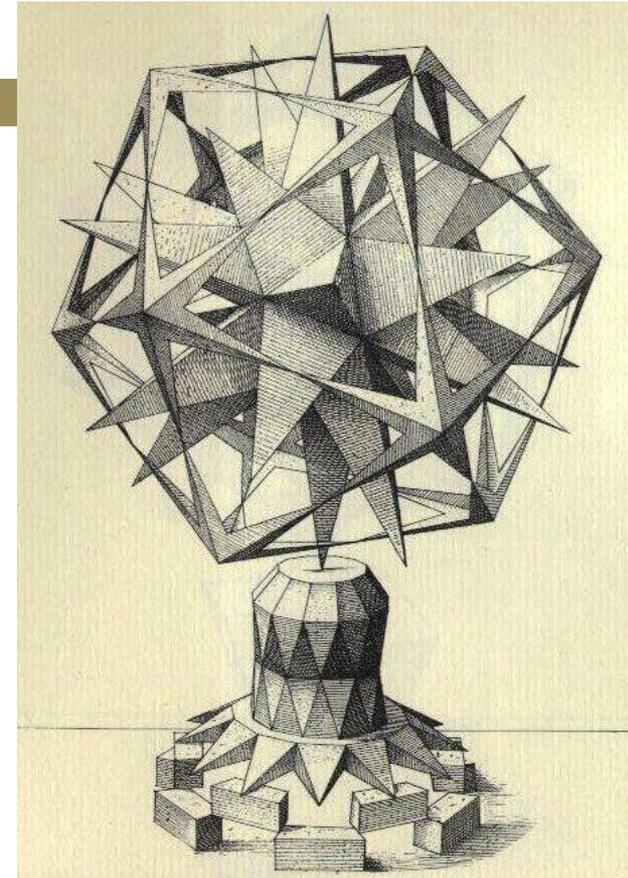


Plato is depicted in Raphael's *The School of Athens* anachronistically carrying a bound copy of *Timaeus*.
c 1509

- Utopia, influenced a genre of philosophical writing
- Theory of ideas, a new kind of wrestling with the problem of universals
- Immortality, mystical → argument for the immortal soul
- Cosmogony, the world as living creature with soul
- Theory of knowledge, reminiscent rather than from perception

Influences

- **Pythagoras:** Orphic elements of philosophy
 - ▣ Religious trend, immortality, priestly tone, other-worldliness
 - ▣ Respect for mathematics
 - ▣ Mingling of intellect and mysticism
- **Parmenides (Eleatic):** Reality as eternal, timeless → change is illusion
- **Heraclitus:** Nothing permanent in the sensible world
 - ▣ Combined with Parmenides's philosophy, led Plato to belief that knowledge comes from the intellect and not the senses.
- **Socrates:** Concern with the “good” and ethics
 - ▣ Most of the pre-Socratic schools less interested in “The Good” → Plato's interest in this come Socrates



A drawing of an imaginary sculpture by Renaissance artist Wenzel Jamnitzer. 1568.

Skeptical of democracy

- Aristocratic → associated with the rule of the Thirty Tyrants (pro-Spartan oligarchy installed in Athens after 404 BCE)
 - ▣ Reigned for eight months, killed 5% of the Athenian population, exiled democratic supporters, confiscated property
- Lived through Athens defeat by Sparta
- His teacher, Socrates, was killed by democratic government
- Turns to Sparta for a model of his ideal commonwealth

Bertrand Russell's theory of Plato's authoritarianism

1. Goodness/Reality as timeless → states should copy heavenly models, i.e. static perfection and minimum change
 - Rulers those who best understand this eternal Good
2. Similar to other mystics, a center certainty inexpressible except by way of life
 - Pythagoreans: desired to set up the rule of the initiated, which influenced Plato's own views of proper political hierarchies → Statesmen must understand 'the Good', and can only know it through strict moral and intellectual discipline (the absence of this will lead to corruption)
3. According to Plato, being a good ruler required extensive education, including in geometry and mathematics.
 - Influenced by Pythagoras: without mathematics, no true wisdom is possible. Russell claims that this implies an oligarchy.
4. Leisure essential to wisdom → wisdom not found among those who must work for their living
 - Must be relieved from the burden and anxieties of making a living. An essentially aristocratic view

Plato's five regimes of government

Republic, Book VIII

- **Timocracy:** People who love honor; arises from the aristocracy after civil war between aristocracy and the majority
 - Non-aristocratic birthrates will outnumber aristocratic, and will degrade concern with knowledge, music, “guardian education” towards acquiring possession and money
 - Civil war will erupt between those who value wisdom and those who value money until a compromise is reached
- **Oligarchy:** emerges from confusion between wealth and honor → want to acquire wealth by any means
 - Injustice divides rich and poor so much that the rulers cannot wage war because arming the poor would be too risky
- **Democracy:** When the poor overthrow the wealthy → create varied collections of people under ‘supermarket’ of constitutions
 - Demagogue who seems appealing is lifted up with support of the lower classes, but grants too much freedoms → ruler works to satisfy base pleasures
- **Tyranny:** Demagogue turned tyrant → the lower classes invest more and more power into the demagogue in an attempt to maintain their liberties, and the demagogue becomes corrupted by the power → takes absolute control over his people

Wisdom as model for political power

Two questions emerge from these issues:

1. Is there such a thing as 'wisdom'?
2. Can a constitution be constructed to give it political power?

