

Unit 50

Who is a Human Person

SAMPLE UNIT

Part 2

Part Two: Philosophers of Ancient Greece

Focus:

- Socrates, Plato and Aristotle lived in Athens during a time of political instability but also of cultural vibrancy.
- According to Socrates, the highest good is human happiness, and knowledge or intelligence is the means of attaining happiness.
- Plato's contribution to philosophy includes the theory of forms, the theory of knowledge, the theory of the soul and the theory of love.
- Aristotle's contribution to philosophy includes the theory of forms, the principle of the four causes, the theory of the soul and the theory of the unmoved mover.
- Plato and Aristotle took existing ideas about the soul to another level by systematically theorising about them.
- The human person is both a physical body and a spiritual soul, and each is created for a purpose, to establish a relationship with God here on earth and live forever with God in eternity.

Important Words

Extant – still in existence, surviving

Hegemon – supreme leader with dominant authority over others

Hemlock – a poisonous plant from the parsley family

Socratic Method – a method of dialogue in which Socrates exposed the erroneous beliefs of others through questioning

Contextual Background

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are among the most prominent philosophers in the ancient Greek world. Collectively they lived from 469 BCE to 322 BCE.

At that time Greece was not a single country like it is today, but was made up of numerous city states, each controlling up to 1300 square kilometres of territory. Athens, the home of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, was one of these city states. This city was governed democratically, democracy having been introduced in 508 BCE by Cleisthenes, often known as the Father of Athenian Democracy.

Political Instability

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle lived during a period of political instability. Between 490 and 449 BCE Greece was under attack by the Persians, who attempted to conquer the country. However, the Greek city states joined forces and managed to repel the Persians. At other times, however, the city states were constantly quarrelling. For example, Sparta and Athens fought an extensive war, known as the Peloponnesian War, from 431 to 404 BCE.

The rising power of Macedonia during the fourth century culminated with the defeat of an allied army of Thebes and Athens in 338 BCE, effectively making the Macedonian king, Philip II, de facto hegemon of all of Greece. Philip II was successful in preventing the majority of the city states from warring with each other by compelling them to join the League of Corinth. Philip's son, Alexander the Great, turned his armies on Persia, defeating the king of Persia in 331 BCE.

Thriving Culture

Although marred by warring, the period was nevertheless one of cultural vibrancy. Religion thrived, as the Greeks dedicated temples and shrines to their plethora of deities. The Greek people placed great value on the arts and literature. Works of art included painting, sculpture, mosaics and metalworking, and literary works covered areas such as poetry and history. People commonly participated in recreational activities such as athletics and other sporting events.





Interactive Activity

Contextual Background

Play

Socrates

Born in 469 BCE, Socrates was arguably one of the greatest philosophers. It is doubtful that Socrates committed his ideas to writing because there are no extant literary works attributed to him. Most of what is known about him comes from Socrates' student, Plato, and to a lesser extent Xenophon. Their writings concerning Plato should not be understood as history in the sense we understand it. There is consensus among scholars that, while their writings concerning Socrates are authentic, they were most probably modified to suit their authors' purpose.

Life of Socrates

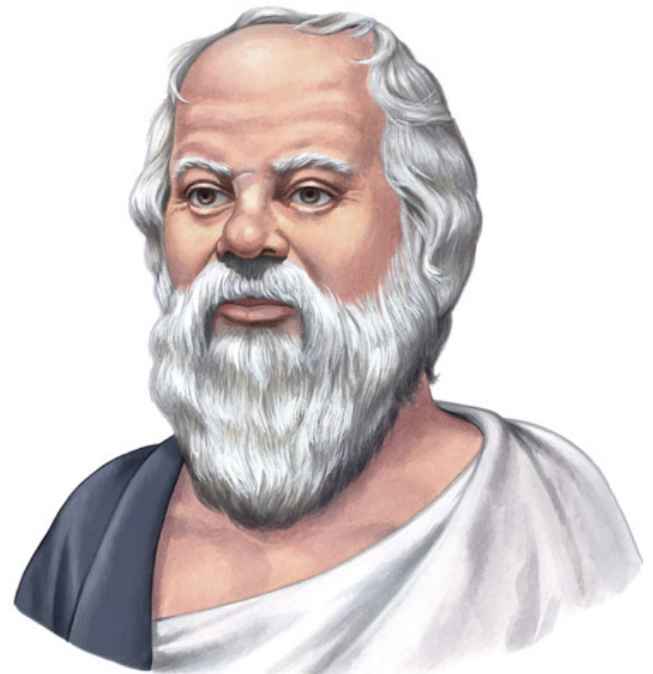
Socrates' father was a sculptor, while his mother was a midwife. During his early life, Socrates took up his father's trade. Later, he served in the army, where he was recognised for his courage and perseverance.

Although shabbily dressed and having adopted a modest life style, Socrates nevertheless liked to drink with gentlemen, and he enjoyed their company. He spent most of his time in the marketplace, where he engaged people in dialogue about virtue and self-examination, believing that a life unscrutinised was not worth living. During these conversations Plato cross-examined people and exposed their erroneous beliefs through questioning, a method known as the Socratic Method.

In 406 BCE, Socrates assumed membership to the Council of Five Hundred. A man of moral courage and uprightness, he engaged in public affairs with justice and integrity, sometime risking his own life in doing so.

According to tradition, a friend of Socrates visited the oracle at Delphi, inquiring if there was any wiser man than Socrates in Athens. The oracle said that there was no wiser person than Socrates. This puzzled Socrates because the oracle did not affirm that he was the wisest man, saying only that there was no wiser person than him in Athens. Reflecting on this, Socrates concluded that his wisdom could be attributed to his ignorance.

Socrates believed that the gods were only relevant as far as guiding one's life, because human beings know nothing of them and therefore should not involve themselves with the affairs of heaven.





Trial and Death of Socrates

In 399 BCE, two charges were brought against Socrates:

1. Heresy for denying the existence of the gods
2. Corruption of the youth of Athens

Crito, a friend of Socrates, arranged for Socrates to escape, but he refused. He was brought before a jury of five hundred men at which he was found guilty. Asked to propose his punishment, Socrates suggested that the government should provide him with free dinners for the rest of his life, due to the good he had done for society. Hardly a statement likely to endear himself before his judges, the jury sentenced Socrates to death. Ordered to drink a cup of poison from a hemlock, Socrates complied and died shortly afterwards.

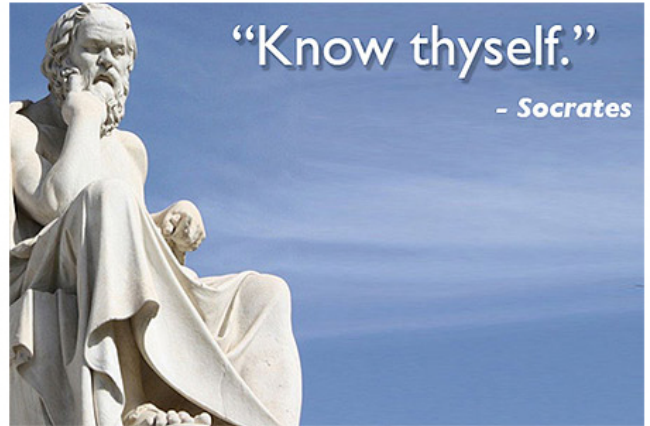


Socrates' Philosophy

Socrates was concerned with ethics, reflecting on questions, such as:

- What is right and wrong?
- What is friendship?
- What is courage?
- How does one attain happiness?

Socrates argued that a good thing or being was not good because the gods judged them to be good. Rather, they were intrinsically good, that is, good in themselves. Morality was rooted in the individual's conscience, not in the decrees of the gods, nor in what was considered to be socially good. He attributed the moral degradation of the educated class, disorderly individualism and disrespect for the elderly to the failure of people to scrutinise their beliefs and behaviours by human reasoning.



According to Socrates, knowledge is the greatest of all virtues, and right action originates from knowledge. The highest good is human happiness, and knowledge or intelligence is the means of attaining happiness. Accordingly, human beings are to direct their lives through knowledge of self and the guidance of their intellects.

Multimedia Activity

1. View the [YouTube](#) video clip titled, 'Socrates: Biography of a Great Thinker'.
2. In small groups, use the [Mind Mapping Strategy](#) to *summarise* the life of Socrates and the contribution he made to the development of philosophy.



Slideshow

Socrates

View



Interactive Activity

Socrates

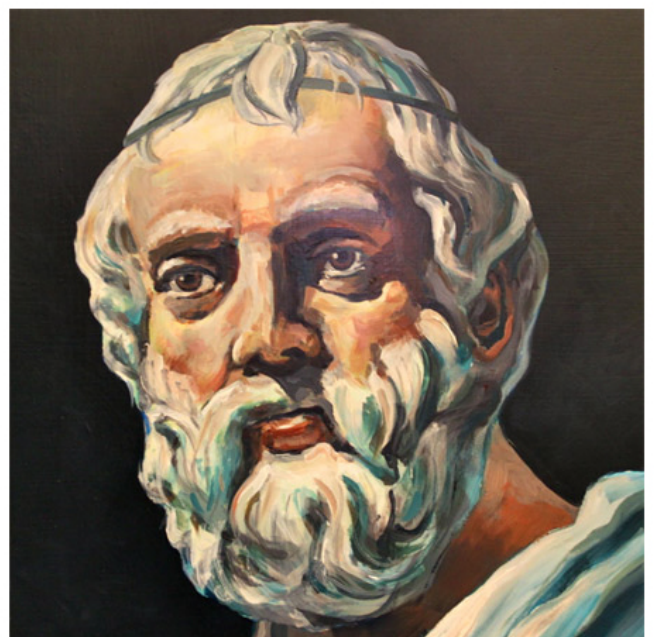
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Plato

Widely regarded as the father of philosophy, Plato was a prolific writer. As a young man, he listened and talked extensively with Socrates, and he recorded Socrates' teachings and philosophical ideas after the death of Socrates. The style of these writings is unique in the sense that they consist of a dialogue in which the character of Socrates interrogated his fellow citizens about societal values and notions such as virtue and happiness. Plato established the first university in Europe. It was known as Plato's Academy, and it became an important centre of philosophy for almost nine centuries.

Life of Plato

Born in 429 BCE, Plato came from a wealthy aristocratic family. He served as a soldier from 409 BCE to 404 BCE in the The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta. Prior to this, Plato served as a politician, and he had hoped to return to political life again, but the excesses of political life and the execution of Socrates in 399 BCE convinced him to abandon his political ambitions. Plato travelled through Italy, Sicily and Egypt, returning to Athens in 387 BCE. Upon his return to Athens, Plato founded the Academy, where he taught until his death in 347 BCE.





Fresco by Raphael (1509-1511) titled *The School of Athens*. The two central figures are Plato and Aristotle.

After his return to Athens Plato wrote the *Republic*, which is arguably his greatest masterpiece. The most comprehensive of all his dialogues, the *Republic* dealt with topics, such as:

- Cardinal virtues (wisdom, temperance, courage and justice)
- Education
- Happiness
- The human soul
- Equality of women
- Art of governing
- Wealth and power
- The reformation of the gods
- The theory of knowledge
- Metaphysics



Plato's Philosophies

In the theory of Forms Plato posits that the ever changing material world as we see it is not real, but is a copy of an unchanging and unseen world of forms created by a divine being. This unchanging and unseen world is the cause of what we recognise as the material world in which we live. This world is the way it is, because this is the best way for it to be.

In developing his theory of knowledge, Plato argued that opinions may be true or false, but knowledge comes from divine insight and can be only of what is true. Knowledge, being a non-experiential form, is a matter of recollection rather than observation and study, and must be supported by evidence.

Plato taught that the soul is immortal, and he produced nineteen proofs to support his argument. At death, the body is separated from the soul, and the human soul lives on forever. His writings contain several lengthy speeches in which he explores the nature of the afterlife.

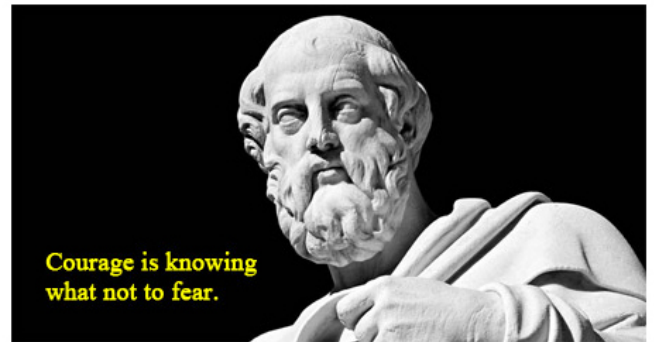
The soul has three attributes, which Plato calls appetite, spirit and reason (or logic), and they correspond to the three-tiered caste system of society. The lowest caste, the workers, corresponds to the appetite part of the soul, which is located in the middle to lower part of the torso. The warrior caste corresponds to the spirit part of the soul, which is located in the upper part of the torso. Finally, the governing caste corresponds to the reason part of the soul, which is located in the head.

Plato argued that love is:

A universal force that moves all things - as far as they are able - towards peace, perfection and divinity. Accordingly, love is active at many levels and is expressed in diverse ways, from animal lust to sexual love, to friendship, to politics and community service, to the creation of art and literature.

- Patricia F., Dr O'Grady, 'Meet the Philosophers of Ancient Greece: Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Ancient Greek Philosophy,' Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2005, p.134

Accordingly, love of knowledge, beauty and virtue are far superior to love of the body.



Multimedia Activity

1. View the [YouTube](#) video clip titled, 'Plato: Biography of a Great Thinker'.
2. In small groups, use the [Ideas Wheel Strategy](#) to *summarise* the life of Plato and the contribution he made to the development of philosophy.



Slideshow

Plato

View



Interactive Activity

Plato

Play

Aristotle

Aristotle is arguably one of the greatest and most influential thinkers to this day. It is believed that he wrote more than two hundred books, but only a small number are extant. Collectively, Aristotle's works constitute a comprehensive encyclopaedia of Greek knowledge, covering diverse fields, such as logic, politics, philosophy, poetry, ethics, meteorology, rhetoric and biology. He established the world's first zoo and botanical garden in Lyceum, and the knowledge gained from this endeavour was to form the foundation of the world's scientific knowledge about natural science. He also invented the method for classifying animals which is still employed today.

Life of Aristotle

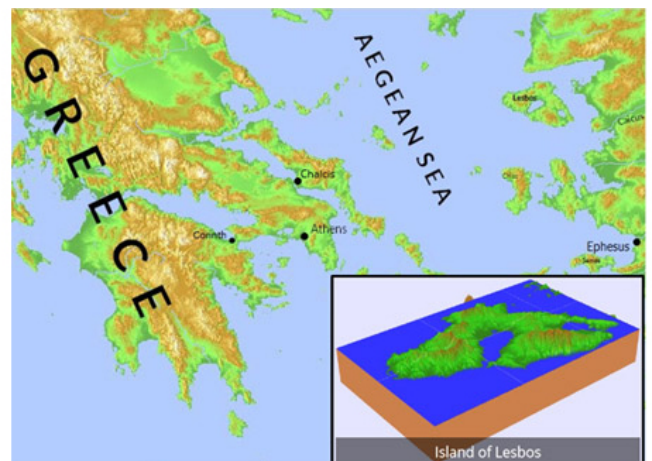
Aristotle was born in 384 BCE in Macedonia. His father served the king of Macedonia, Philip II, as a physician. At about the age of eighteen, Aristotle settled in Athens, and he spent twenty years at Plato's Academy, initially as a student and finally as a teacher.

After the death of Plato in 347 BCE Aristotle travelled to the island of Lesbos with a friend. Here they studied the fauna and flora of the island. Returning to Athens in 335 BCE, Aristotle founded his own school, the Lyceum, where he taught for twelve years.



Fresco titled School of Aristotle by Gustav Adolph Spangenberg, 1883-88

In 343 BCE king Philip II invited Aristotle to come to Macedonia to tutor his son, who was later to become known as Alexander the Great. When Alexander the Great died in 323 BCE Aristotle returned to Athens. However, anti-Macedonian sentiment had become strong among the Athenians. They accused Aristotle of disrespecting the gods. Knowing that Socrates had been sentenced to death on the same charge, Aristotle escaped to Chalcis, where he died in 322 BCE.



Aristotle's Philosophies

Aristotle taught that all living beings possess a soul which is inseparable from the physical being itself. Human beings possess a soul which is inseparable from the body, even when a person dies. In Aristotle's view, then, the soul is not immortal, but ceases to live when the person dies.

Aristotle argued that objects consist of both matter and form and neither can exist without the other. Matter is the substance of which something is made. It is not created, but is eternal. By contrast, form is what transforms matter into a specific thing with a specific purpose.

Aristotle advanced the principle of the four causes. The material cause is the stuff of which a particular thing or being is made, for example, a lump of clay. The efficient cause is whoever or whatever manipulates that material, for example, a potter who is shaping the lump of clay into a jug. The final cause refers to the purpose of manipulating the material, for example, the potter making a jug instead of a cup. The formal cause refers to what the final product is and what it is designed to do, for example, the finished jug, designed to hold oil or water.

The human soul is, according to Aristotle, the efficient, final and formal cause of the body. The soul is responsible for developing the body (efficient cause). The soul 'manipulates' the developing body so that it becomes a human being rather than, say, a dog (final cause). The soul is responsible for what the human body is and what it does and is designed to do (formal cause).

A person's soul, then, is his or her capacity to engage in the activities that are characteristic of living beings:

- Self-nourishment
- Growth
- Decay
- Movement and rest
- Perception
- Intellect

The ability to reason and think is what sets human beings apart from all other living creatures, and this was considered by Aristotle to be the function of the human person, that is, what the human person is designed to do. According to Aristotle's ethical theory, human beings are designed to achieve profound and lasting happiness and contentment, and they can only attain this by perfecting their reasoning and thinking.

Aristotle attempted to explain motion in the universe. He reasoned that one object can cause another to move, which in turn can cause something else to move, but there must be one thing which caused the first motion to occur without itself being moved. He argued that this thing is entirely immobile and separate from matter, is divine and imparts motion eternally. Since motion is eternal, that thing, the unmoved mover, must itself be eternal and it must impart motion without itself being moved. It is the primary or first cause of all motion observed in the universe.



Arsitotle and His Pupil, Alexander

Formal Cause



Final Cause



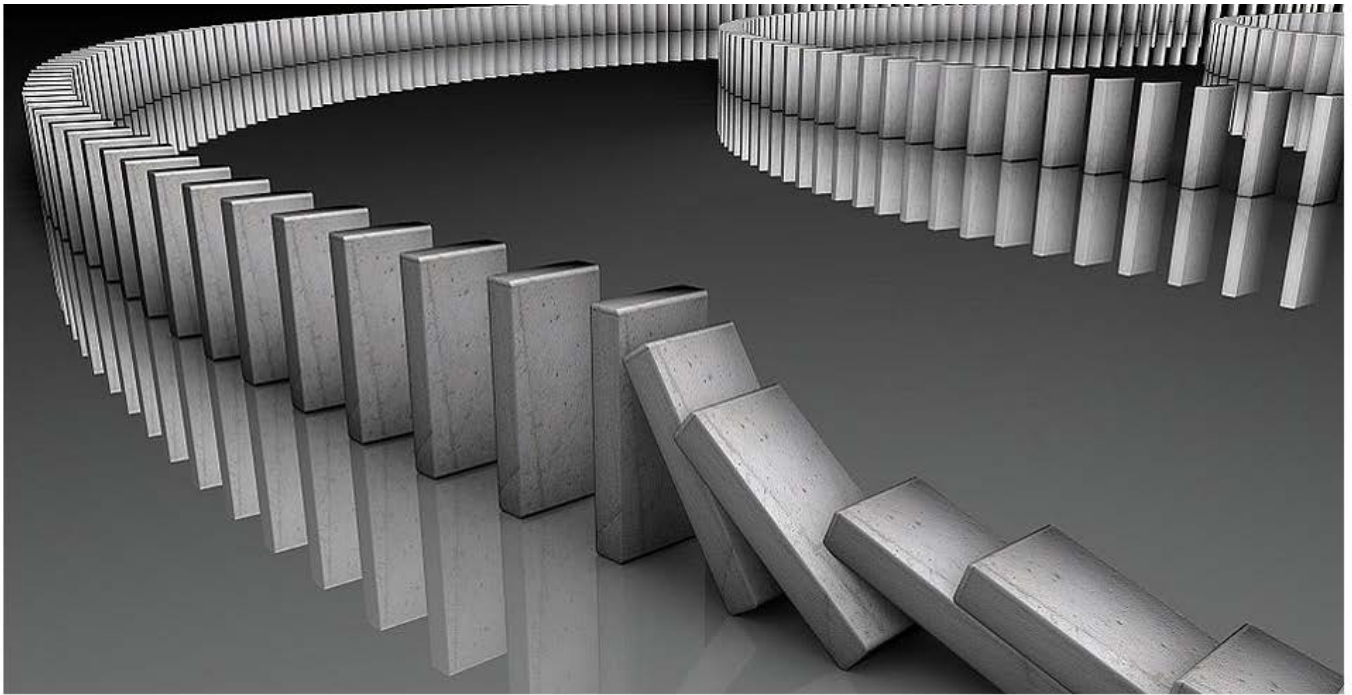
Efficient Cause



Material Cause



Formal, Final, Efficient and Material Cause



Although Plato was Aristotle's mentor and teacher, many of Aristotle's ideas contradicted those of Plato.

Unlike Plato who denied that sense experience was necessary for knowledge, Aristotle held that knowledge was impossible without sense experience; unlike Plato who believed that the soul could exist independently of the body and survive death, Aristotle rejected the notion of personal immortality and held that the soul could not exist without the body; and unlike Plato who believed that matter was created by something he called the 'demiurge', Aristotle believed that matter was eternal - it has always existed and always will exist.

- Patricia F. Dr O'Grady, 'Meet the Philosophers of Ancient Greece: Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Ancient Greek Philosophy,' Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2005, p.134

Multimedia Activity

1. View the [YouTube](#) video clip titled, 'Aristotle: Biography of a Great Thinker'.
2. In small groups, use the [PMI Chart Strategy](#) to *summarise* the life of Aristotle and the contribution he made to the development of philosophy.



Slideshow

The Unmoved Mover

View



Slideshow

Aristotle

View



Interactive Activity

Aristotle

Play

Plato and Aristotle's Contribution to Understanding the Soul

The concept of the soul is ancient and a variety of beliefs about the soul may be found among different cultures throughout the world. Simply put, the soul was regarded as the essence of a human being. It is that which makes a human being human by conferring individuality and humanity. In many cultures, the soul was thought to be one and the same as the mind or the self. It was commonly thought that all living beings possessed a soul, which was distinct from the physical being itself, yet residing in it.

These ideas about the soul would have been known to Plato and Aristotle, but they took these ideas to another level by systematically theorising about them. Plato attempted to prove that the soul was immortal, and he posited that when a person died the soul separated from the body. He also attempted to explain the three-tiered caste structure of society in terms of the nature of the soul and its location within the body. By doing this, Plato devised a framework to explain why society is structured the way it is.

Aristotle linked the human soul to an ethical framework. The soul is a person's capacity to engage in the activities that are characteristic of living beings (self-nourishment, growth, decay, movement, rest, perception and intellect). Therefore, the soul is responsible for what the human body is and what it does and is designed to do. Aristotle argued that human beings are designed to attain perfect happiness and this can only be achieved by cultivation of knowledge, perception and intellect.



Plato and Aristotle

Contribution to the Development of Catholic Theology

Although Plato and Aristotle were pagans, their philosophies have exercised a profound influence on the foundational Catholic theological concepts of what it means to be human. Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, both prominent Church Fathers, were heavily indebted to their philosophical theories of the soul.

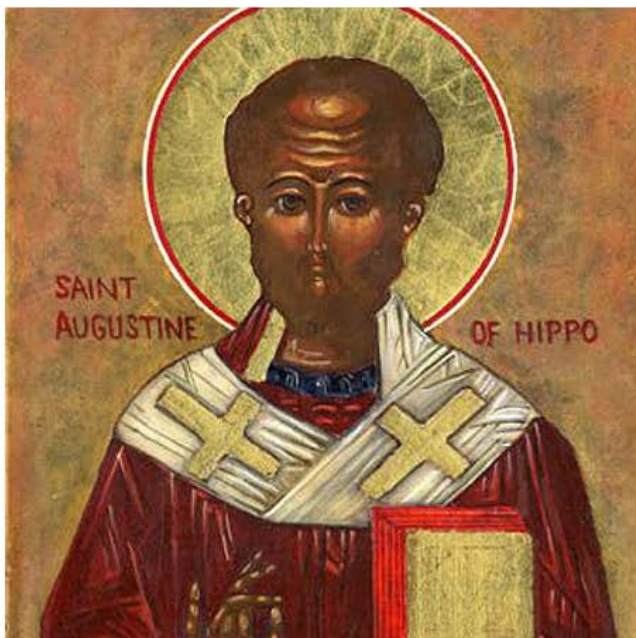


St Clement of Alexandria

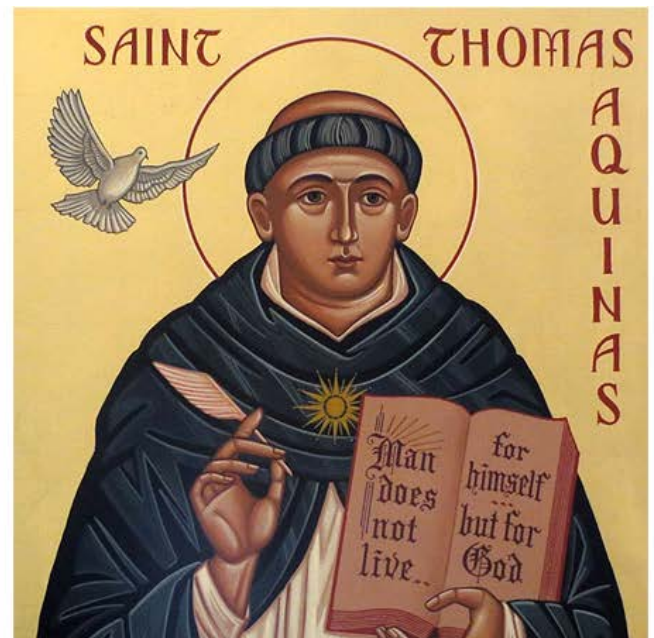
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St Gregory of Nyssa



St Augustine



St Thomas Aquinas

Christian theology St. Augustine spoke of the soul as a 'rider' on the body, making clear the split between the material and the immaterial, with the soul representing the 'true' person. However, although body and soul were separate, it was not possible to conceive of a soul without its body. In the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas returned to the Greek philosophers' concept of the soul as a motivating principle of the body, independent but requiring the substance of the body to make an individual.

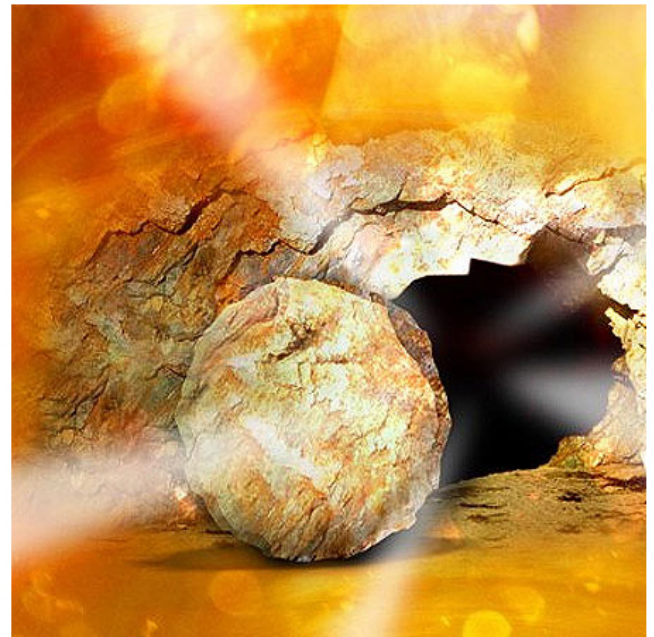
- Available at: www.britannica.com/.../soul-religion-and-philosophy

Implications of a God-Centred Understanding of Being Human

A foundational doctrine in Catholic theology is the notion that the human person is both a physical body and a spiritual soul. Each is created for a purpose, to establish a relationship with God here on earth and to live forever with God in eternity. Death marks the end of a person's physical life and the beginning of his or her eternal life, 'the life of the world to come'. The soul, which is created by God and described as the breath of God, does not perish.

Catholics share in the life of God through their Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead, not as a spirit, but in his own body, although at first, the disciples did not recognise him. Catholics believe they will experience eternal life in bodies transformed and glorified like that of the risen Jesus.

Our relationship with God comes to its fulfilment after death when we enter God's presence. What a person does during his or her earthly life will affect what happens after death. Catholics believe all people will be judged on how they have lived their lives. Those who have loved God and their neighbour, as well as those who have cut themselves off completely from God and harmed their neighbour, will both face the consequences of their actions.





Interactive Activity

The Soul in Catholic Theology

Play

Learning Activity

1. Choose one gospel account of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his followers from the following list and available at: www.catholic.org.
2. With a partner, use the If And Then Chart Strategy and your chosen gospel account to consider implications of Jesus' bodily resurrection on our own, e.g. If the risen Jesus could... then, at our bodily resurrection we...
 - a. Matthew 28:9-10;17-20
 - b. Mark 16:12-14
 - c. Luke 24:13-53
 - d. John 20:11-31;21:1-14.
3. Join with another pair and compare your findings.