

For more than two millennia, philosophers have grappled with life's most profound issues. It is easy to forget, however, that these "eternal" questions are not eternal at all; rather, they once had to be asked for the first time.

It was the Athenian citizen and philosopher Socrates who first asked these questions in the 5th century B.C. "Socrates," notes award-winning Professor Robert C. Bartlett, "was responsible for a fundamentally new way of philosophizing": trying to understand the world by reason.

**Masters of Greek Thought: Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle**, a 36-lecture course taught by Professor Bartlett, provides you with a detailed analysis of the golden age of Athenian philosophy and the philosophical consequences that occurred when Socrates—followed first by his student Plato and then by Plato's own student Aristotle—permanently altered our approach to the most important questions humanity can pose.

### **What Was the "Socratic Turn"?**

The Socratic break with earlier philosophy was a shift in thought that led to some of the most important and intellectually exciting concepts in all of philosophy. Socrates' influence on a new generation of philosophers, most importantly, Plato and Aristotle, ensured that his ideas would change the face of philosophy.

Prior to Socrates' new approach, philosophy was concerned primarily with the project of "natural philosophy": a prescientific study of nature and the physical world. Professor Bartlett begins the course with a discussion of how Socrates came to the "Socratic turn" that veered away from the study of natural science and toward the scrutiny of moral opinion. You recognize how crucial this turn was because it became the fulcrum around which a new era of philosophy turned. Never again could philosophers return to their ancient role of merely attempting to grasp the natural order of a world previously ascribed to the planning or whimsy of the gods.

The new arguments that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle posed were intended not for other philosophers but for anyone seeking to live a thoughtful and attentive life. Throughout the course, you come to see how their inquiries about the fundamental meanings and implications of ideas like justice, virtue, and happiness pushed their fellow citizens to ponder the roles such ideas played in their daily lives and in society. They even asked their peers to consider whether these and other questions were ones that anyone could hope to answer.

### **See Socrates through Plato's Eyes**

Unfortunately, the thinker who forever altered the course of philosophy never actually wrote down his words. So how can we hope to know what Socrates, whom many believe to be the foundational thinker of Western philosophy, really believed?

The answer, Professor Bartlett shows, lies in the fact that much of Socrates' philosophy is captured in the writings of his contemporaries and followers. As a means of leading you to a sharper picture of the real Socrates, the course introduces you to the writings of three key figures:

- **Xenophon:** the great thinker and military commander who wrote a series of Socratic sayings that survives to this day
- **Aristophanes:** whose comic play *Clouds* is both a send-up and a thoughtful critique of Socrates that is crucial to understanding his philosophical evolution
- **Plato:** a brilliant young man from a wealthy and politically active family who became Socrates' best student and whose works, written in the form of dialogues between two or more persons, feature Socrates as the protagonist

Plato, in particular, is an essential source of information about Socrates. Over the course of a dozen lectures, you explore the wide variety of Plato's brilliant dialogues and how they reflect the core of Socrates' philosophy of morality and justice:

- *Alcibiades I*, which depicts Socrates' reasoning why the young Alcibiades needs him
- *Symposium*, in which seven partiers discuss the nature of love
- *Republic*, perhaps Plato's best-known work, which focuses on the definition and nature of justice
- *Protagoras*, in which Socrates and Protagoras argue whether virtue can be taught
- *Gorgias*, which depicts an argument over who is more important, the philosopher or the rhetorician
- *Meno*, which seeks to come to a general definition of virtue

Professor Bartlett then turns the discussion to those Platonic dialogues that cover the well-known trial and execution of Socrates at the hands of the Athenian state. By examining *Euthyphro*, *Apology of Socrates*, and *Crito* as a whole, you develop a deeper understanding of the defense strategy Socrates chose, why he chose it, and how it ultimately failed him. You also review whether Plato's sympathetic defense of his teacher was successful in the long run.

### **Aristotle's Philosophy of Human Affairs**

Throughout **Masters of Greek Thought**, Professor Bartlett guides you deep into nuanced philosophical discussions while keeping the thread of the arguments both clear and exhilarating. This becomes especially important when you focus on the third iconic philosopher this course covers: Aristotle.

A student of Plato's famed Academy, Aristotle did more than anyone to establish a comprehensive system of philosophy in the West. His work encompassed the fields of morality, politics, aesthetics, logic, science, rhetoric, theology, metaphysics, and more. Scholars today believe that only about a third of his work survives.

In keeping with the theme of the course, Professor Bartlett, who has translated selected works by Xenophon and Plato from the original Greek, focuses your attention on Aristotle's work on the philosophy of human affairs. You delve into two of the philosopher's major writings:

- *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is a stunning approach to questions of virtue and moral character

- *Politics*, which continues the ideas of individual and interpersonal ethics first developed in *Nicomachean Ethics* and discusses their logical extension into the governance of the city-state

### **Learn from Socrates and His Heirs**

A distinguished teacher and translator and the recipient of numerous teaching awards, including an award for excellence in teaching in the social sciences from Emory University's Center for Teaching and Curriculum, Professor Bartlett keeps his presentation of these three great thinkers not only clear but also accessible, unimimidating, and relevant to each of us today.

The insights **Masters of Greek Thought** offers into the minds of these three foundational figures of Western philosophy and the care with which Professor Bartlett unpacks their words bring the ideas of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle into sharp focus for you. More than 2,000 years later, you find their questions on the nature of justice, virtue, and happiness pushing you to ponder the roles such ideas play in your daily life and in the life of your society.