

## Ancient Philosophies as Ways of Life

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### I

Socrates (d. 399 BCE)  
Plato (d. 347 BCE)  
Aristotle (d. 322 BCE)  
Epicurus (d. 270 BCE)  
Stoics (c. 280 BCE-200 CE)  
Pyrrhonian Sceptics (1st c. BCE-200 CE)  
Plotinus (d. 270 CE)  
Last pagan philosophers (c. 550 CE)

### II

The three main divisions of philosophy—traditional modern, contemporary, ancient:

1. Natural philosophy/metaphysical philosophy/moral philosophy
2. Metaphysics/epistemology/ethics (or value theory)
3. Dialectic/physics/ethics

### III

Main points of Socrates' philosophy:

1. Philosophical insight and reasoning is the sole ultimate authority as to how one should live one's whole life—what one should do, what one should not do, in any circumstance, and with what thoughts and in what spirit one should do it.
2. The most important thing for anyone is their soul, and its condition, good or bad.
3. The good condition of the soul is virtue (or excellence of the soul and person, as such), and virtue is wisdom (that is, philosophical knowledge of what is good and what is bad in a human life).
4. Virtue (wisdom) makes one's life fulfilled and happy, and is necessary for complete human fulfillment and happiness.
5. All (adult) human actions are fully motivated by (that is, they ultimately derive psychologically from) what the agent at the time of action thinks (at least implicitly and by assumption) is the best thing to be doing then, given the circumstances as the agent takes them to be.
6. Actually achieving wisdom appears to be so hard that pretty much no human being does ever finally achieve it.

## IV

Philosophy as a way of life includes three essential roles for philosophy:

1. Philosophy tells you how to live—what to do, what not to do, with what thoughts, in what spirit.
2. One thing that philosophy tells you is that philosophical study (discussions, etc.) is a very good thing, and should be included in your life (if you are up to it).
3. Philosophical understanding, lodged in your mind, steers your whole life, by directly and on its own moving you to every choice and action making up your life.