# Companion Website

## The philosophy

WARNING: These are *not* the answers; rather, they are here for your own interest and to help you build a conceptual map of the issues contained in the sessions. You may find some of the ideas controversial, so do not feel that you have to agree with the philosophers; but at all times remember that if you disagree, then try to formulate reasons why you disagree.

## The Chair

**Berkeley and Idealism**

**Biography**: George Berkeley (1685–1753), also known as Bishop Berkeley, was an Irish philosopher and clergyman.

**Big idea**: *Idealism* – the view that reality consists of ideas rather than matter.

**Main publication(s)**: *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713).

**Useful quote**: '*Esse est percipi*' ['to be is to be perceived'] (*A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*).

**About**: If one were to remove all the aspects of an object that come to us through our perception of the object, Berkeley thought there would, at the end, be nothing there. Berkeley thought that physical objects do not exist independently of the mind of a perceiver. For something to exist it needs to be perceived by something or someone capable of perception. But what stops the room from disappearing when you leave the room? Berkeley would say that the room is still perceived in the mind of God.

**Food for thought**:

- What if . . . ? If a tree fell in a forest and no one was around to hear it would it make a sound?
- Dr. Johnson famously kicked a stone and said about Berkeley's theory, 'I refute it thus.' By kicking the stone had Dr. Johnson refuted    idealism?
- Try this thought experiment: hold an object in front of you, such as a glass. Now, using your imagination, remove the perceptions you have of the object, such as the hardness, the distorted vision, its smoothness. Once you have

removed all the qualities of the object that you perceive, what have you left? Berkeley thought that you would have nothing left, and that this shows objects can only be if they are perceived. Can you think of something that would be left over?

**Kant and the 'Thing In Itself'**
**Biography**: Kant
**Big idea**: *Ding an sich*. (thing in itself).
**Main publication(s)**: *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).
**Useful quote**: 'What the things-in-themselves may be I do not know, nor do I need to know, since a thing can never come before me except in appearance' (*Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Norman Kemp Smith).
**About**: Kant distinguished between a thing as it appears to us through our perception of it and a thing as it is in itself. By this he meant, as it is when it is unperceived. Unlike Berkeley, he did not think a thing ceased to exist when unperceived but that it is unknowable as it is in itself. On this basis Kant divided the world into two: the noumenal world and phenomenal world. The phenomenal is the world of appearances, or the world as we experience it (or as it can possibly be experienced). The noumenal world is the world as it is beyond our ability to experience it.
**Food for thought**:

- What do you think something is like when it is totally unperceived by anyone or anything?
- Is it possible to get beyond our particular perspective about something?
- Is any branch of knowledge (for example, mystical experience, science, mathematics) truly objective?
- Do we see things as they really are? Do we know things are they really are? Do we experience things as they really are?

# The Meaning of Ant Life

**Aristotle and Teleology**
**Biography**: Aristotle
**Big idea**: *Teleology* from the Ancient Greek *telos* meaning 'design', 'end' or 'purpose'.
**Main publication(s)**: *Physics*.
**Useful quote**: 'It is absurd to suppose that purpose is not present because we do not observe the agent deliberating. Art does not deliberate. If the ship building art were in the wood, it would produce the same results by nature.

If, therefore, purpose is present in art, it is present also in nature. The best illustration is a doctor doctoring himself: nature is like that … That nature is a cause, then, and a cause in this way, *for something*, is plain.' (*Physics* 199b)

**About**: For Aristotle all you need to do is find out what something is for in order to discover its meaning. A knife is for cutting and a human is for thinking rationally. He reasoned that this was the case because rational thought is the capacity that human beings have that other living things such as plants and animals do not. Rational thought, for Aristotle, is an essential feature of human beings (see Sine qua non, page 51).

**Food for thought**:

- Does this mean that a more rational person is a better human being?
- Does it also mean that children born with brain damage for instance and therefore with a very low rational capacity are not human?
- Are human beings for anything?
- Does the science of evolution show that animals, or parts of animals, have a purpose? And does this prove that there must be a designer?

# Can You Step in the Same River Twice?

**Heraclitus and Change**

**Biography**: Heraclitus of Ephesus (fl. circa 500 BCE) was a Pre-Socratic philosopher (that is 'before Socrates').

**Big idea**: *Panta rei* ('everything changes')

**Main publication(s)**: Only about 100 sentences of the book of Heraclitus survive. See *Early Greek Philosophy* by Jonathan Barnes published by Penguin Classics for what survives of his writings.

**Useful quote**: 'It is not possible to step into the same river twice' (quoted in Plato, *Cratylus*, 402A).

**About**: Very little is known about Heraclitus and we can only guess as to why he thought it was impossible to step in the same river twice. If we put his two big ideas together, then we can construct an argument for him as many philosophers (including Plato) have done: if everything is constantly changing then it would be impossible to step in the same river twice because the river too would change from one moment to the next. This would mean that when you step in the river for the second time it has already become a different river. (The children may also construct a similar argument.)

**Food for thought**:

- Is it possible to step in the same river   once?
- Does Heraclitus' idea that everything changes mean you are a completely different person from second to second?
- Can you think of something that doesn't change?

# Republic Island

**Plato and Justice**

**Biography**: Plato (c. 429–347 BCE), probably the best-known philosopher, lived in Athens and was a pupil of Socrates, teacher of Aristotle, and the founder of The Academy in Athens (the first university). Most of his voluminous philosophy was written in the form of dialogues (like plays) with Socrates as the mouthpiece for his ideas. His influence is so great that the philosopher Alfred Whitehead said that all Western philosophy is 'footnotes to Plato'.

**Big idea**: *Justice.*

**Main publication(s)**: *The Republic* is Plato's best-known and most widely read book. It tackles the big question of what justice is both in individuals and in the state. It is also notable for its readability and therefore a good place to start if you want to read some of philosophy's primary source material.

**Useful quote**: 'A man is just in the same way that a state is just … Justice in the state meant that each of the three elements within it [businessmen, auxiliaries and governors] was doing the work of its own class … Then we must remember that each of us will be just, and do his duty, only if each part of him is performing its proper function … So it will be the business of reason to rule, having the ability and foresight to act for the whole.' (*Republic*, 441C).

**About**: Justice for Plato was a state in which each part, whether of an individual or the state, performs its proper function. A useful analogy for the just state is a colony of ants in which each ant has its particular job for which it was born; the general harmony of the colony follows from each ant doing what it is designed for or best able to do. See Aristotle and Teleology.

**Food for thought**:

- What do  you think justice is?
- What if . . .? Do you think it is always just to return what belongs to someone? Imagine that you have borrowed a dangerous weapon from someone for something harmless. They ask for it back at a time when they are particularly

unstable and are talking about doing violence against someone. Under these circumstances would it be just to return the item? (This is a scenario Plato asks us to consider.)

# The Ring of Gyges

**Moral Philosophy**

**Kant and Duty**

**Biography**: Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was born in Konigsberg, Prussia, and wrote one of the most influential books of Western philosophy *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). He is the exemplar of 18th-century enlightenment philosophy.

**Big idea**: *Deontology* (duty-based ethics) – the view that the right thing to do comes from acting out of universal duty (that is, duty that holds for everyone). This sense of duty is absolute and therefore independent of the consequences.

**Main publication(s)**: *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785).

**Useful quote**: 'There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely this: *act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law*' (*The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* trans. H. J. Paton).

**About**: For Kant it is not morally good enough that the consequences of an action be deemed to be good, as the intention behind the action may have been wicked; and neither is it good enough for the individual who performs the action to be generally 'a nice person' because their actions issue from their disposition rather than through duty. Only the person who acts from the right moral *intentions* should be considered morally worthy, i.e. she who acts from her *good will* in accordance with the *categorical imperative*.

**Food for thought**:

- The deontological question to ask oneself when faced with a moral decision would be: What do the moral rules say I should do?
- Try out the categorical imperative on the idea of 'promise keeping'. If I 'make a promise with the intention of breaking it' what would it mean if this maxim were a universal law (i.e. a law everyone had to follow)?
- What if . . . ? You had a choice between lying to a Nazi officer to protect a Jew hidden in your house, or telling the truth because you think it morally wrong to lie, what should you do? What does this tell you about deontological ethics?

**Bentham and Consequentialism**

**Biography**: Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was an 18th-century English political and legal philosopher who is considered the spiritual founder of the University of London. His body is still on display at University College London after he, controversially for the time, donated his body to science.

**Big idea**: *Consequentialism* (consequence-based ethics) in contrast to deontology says that it is the consequences that determine whether an action is a morally good one or not.

**Main publication(s)**: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789).

**Useful quote**: '[A]ll inequality that has no special utility to justify it is injustice' (*Supply Without Burthen or Escheat Vice Taxation*, Jeremy Bentham's Economic Writings).

**About**: It is intuitive to think that when we do things we do them with the consequences of our actions in mind; and if the consequences are good then we tend to think that we did a good thing. Many of us work on this principle. But there are some problems with this. How do we know when the consequences can be said to be good? At what point do we decide to make that judgement? Thinking back to the duty-based approach of Kant, does the intention behind the action matter or is it only the consequences that matter?

**Food for thought**:

- The consequentialist question to ask oneself when faced with a moral decision would be: what would bring about the right outcome?
- Does the end always justify the means?

**Aristotle and Virtue Ethics**

**Biography**: Aristotle (384–22 BCE) was the pupil of Plato and the teacher of Alexander the Great. He is considered to be the 'father of logic' and one of the founding fathers of Western science, inventing many of the scientific classifications we use today. After failing to be appointed as Plato's successor as the head of Plato's Academy he left to set up his own school called the Lyceum. Aristotle's science and philosophy was the dominant school of thought for over a thousand years, superseded only in the time of the Renaissance.

**Big idea**: *Virtue ethics* (person-based ethics). This approach is not concerned with the quality of the action but rather with quality of the person. Virtue ethics asks first of all 'What kind of person should I be?' and then asks 'What sorts of virtues should I develop or adopt in order to become the kind of person I should be?'

**Main publication(s)**: *Nichomachean Ethics.*

**Useful quote**: 'The human good turns out to be activity of the soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete. But we must add "in a complete life". For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy' (*Nichomachean Ethics* 1098a).

**About**: For Aristotle 'virtue' meant 'excellence' and a virtuous person is an excellent person. An excellent knife is a knife with the virtue of being sharp and an excellent person is a person with a set of virtues appropriate to humans (as being sharp is to a knife), such as temperance, wisdom, courage, justice and piety. Much has been written about what the best set of virtues would be.

**Food for thought**:

- The virtue-ethicist question to ask oneself when making a moral decision would be:  What would the best kind of person do?
- Try making your own list of top 10 virtues and then try implementing them. Who would you choose as your 'best kind of person'? What virtues do they possess?
- What principle(s) would decide which virtues are good and which bad? What sort of virtue list do you think a professional burglar would draw up?

# The Prince and The Pig

**Mill and Utilitarianism**

**Biography**: John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was a child prodigy and the intense studies his father put him through were probably responsible for an early mental breakdown. He would also become a prominent supporter of women's suffrage and credit many of his philosophical achievements to his wife Harriet Taylor.

**Big idea**: *The Greatest Happiness Principle* – the view that moral and political ends should aim to maximise the amount of happiness in people and society. By 'happiness' Mill meant the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. This is a *consequentialist* moral philosophy; in other words, where that which produces the best outcome is to be morally preferred. Strictly speaking, the Greatest Happiness Principle belongs to Jeremy Bentham, though Mill did much to refine it.

**Main publication(s)**: *On Liberty* (1859) and *Utilitarianism* (1863). *On Liberty* is the philosophical manifesto of liberalism.

**Useful quote**: 'It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question' (*Utilitarianism*).

**About**: Mill also thought that society should be one in which its citizens are free but that their freedom should be limited by what he called *The Harm Principle*: one should be free to do as one wants as long as it does not harm others.

**Food for thought**:

- What if . . .? Would it be justified to execute an innocent person if it produced the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people? Is this a problem for Mill's philosophy?
- Should happiness be the aim of political and moral philosophy?
- What is happiness?
- What if . . .? You could plug into a machine that created a totally believable experience for you in which you were completely happy. Alternatively, you could not plug into the machine and remain in reality where happiness is fleeting and transient. A happy unreality or a happy reality? Would you plug into the machine? What does your answer tell you about your attitude to happiness?

# The Ship of Theseus

**Hobbes and Materialism**

**Biography**: Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was born in 'interesting times'. He lived through the English civil war, and was tutor to the future Charles II whilst exiled in France. He liked to joke that 'fear and I were born twins together' when his mother heard reports of the coming Spanish Armada. The tumultuous times in which he lived may well have inspired his famous picture of the 'state of nature', a time before government when life was 'nasty, brutish and short'. This vision provided the conditions for his 'contract theory' of society, a controversial understanding of why we live with each other rather than against each other in a 'war against all'.

**Big idea**: *Materialism* – the view that everything that exists is *matter*. This contrasts with *idealism*, which states that everything that exists is mental *ideas* only.

**Main publication(s)**: *Leviathan* (1651).

**Useful quote**: 'The [universe] (the whole mass of all things that are), is corporeal, that is to say, body, and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of body, is likewise body, and hath

the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the universe, is body, and that which is not body, is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is not part of it, is *nothing*; and consequently *no where*' (*Leviathan*).

**About**: *Materialism* was espoused by Hobbes but it appeared in philosophy much earlier than Hobbes' time. One of the earliest examples of materialism is the doctrine of 'atoms' that was thought up by the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus and then later adopted and refined by the Epicureans. It holds that there is only 'atoms and void' – nothing else. See Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* for a beautifully written but thoroughly materialistic account of humans, gods and the world by a later Roman writer. Democritus captures the idea of materialism pithily: 'by convention colour, by convention sweet, by convention bitter: in reality *atoms and void*.'

**Food for thought**:

- Can you think of something that exists but is not material? What about love, thoughts, maths?
- Is there a place for the soul in a materialistic universe?
- Can subjective experience be explained by purely material processes?
- Read through the sections on arguments (see Shadow of the Pyramid, and Aristotle and the Logical Syllogism ), then assess Hobbes' argument for materialism earlier in 'Useful quote'.

# The Happy Prisoner

**Locke and Free Will**

**Biography**: John Locke (1632–1704) was born in Somerset. He went on to become an extremely influential philosopher in the British philosophical movement and in political philosophy providing many of the ideas that would inform the principles for the new world of America.

**Big idea**: *Free will* – does the fact that we choose and make decisions prove that we have a free will?

**Main publication(s)**: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).

**Useful quote**: 'Liberty is not an idea belonging to volition, or preferring; but to the person having the power of doing, or forbearing to do, according as the mind shall chose or direct. Our idea of Liberty reaches as far as that power and no farther' (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*).

**About**: In answer to the question next to the 'Big Idea' earlier, Locke answered, 'No.' Just because we choose does not mean we have a truly free will, because

we may not, as in the case of the happy prisoner, be *able* to do otherwise. The prisoner chose to stay in the locked room, but had he chosen to leave, it would have been impossible. Is Locke right? Does this show that our having choice is not sufficient to prove our free will?

**Food for thought**:

- What if . . .? You turned left at a junction instead of right. If we were able to rewind time back to the same moment, would you do the same as you did before or would you be able to act differently?

# Goldfinger

**Frege, Russell and Logic**

**Biographies**: Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) was a German philosopher whose pioneering work in the field of logic was crucial to the development of the language that would lie behind the creation of the modern computer. (Who said philosophy isn't useful!) Although Frege did not invent the subject of logic (see Aristotle and the Logical Syllogism), he is now considered the founder of modern mathematical logic. Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) was a British philosopher who corresponded with Frege and who also contributed a great deal to the development of modern logic. He confounded Frege with his famous paradox known as 'Russell's Paradox' (see 'Food for thought' later).

**Big idea**: *Logic* – from the Ancient Greek *logos* meaning 'word', 'reason', 'account'.

**Main publication(s)**: *Concept-Script* (1879 – Frege) and *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903 – Russell).

**Useful quote**: 'In a logically perfect language, there will be one word and no more for every object, and everything that is not simple will be expressed by a combination of words, by a combination derived, of course, from the words for the simple things that enter in, one word for each simple component' (Russell 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism' *Logic and Knowledge*).

**About**: The German philosopher Leibniz had a dream that a language could be invented that was purely logical and that would be capable of resolving all disputes by a process of calculation. He even built an early calculating machine (computer) in the 17th century. Frege came closest to inventing such a language based on his belief that 'there is nothing more objective than the laws of arithmetic'. He thought this idea would lead to the development of an ultimately objective language: the language of logic. Russell tried to show that all of mathematics was built on the foundations of logical laws. The Austrian

philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Austrian mathematician Kurt Godel would later show the limits of this bold project.

**Food for thought**:

- Can a language be truly objective?
- Can you argue with a logical proof? (See   Aristotle and the Logical Syllogism .)
- Russell's Paradox: 'Most classes are not members of themselves (the class of cats is not a cat), but some classes are members of themselves (the class of classes is a class). Is the class of all classes that are not members of themselves a member of itself? If yes, no. If no, yes.'

# The Frog and the Scorpion

**Sartre, de Beauvoir and Human Nature**

**Biography**: Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980) was a French existentialist philosopher who made philosophising in cafes with cigarettes famous (or infamous). He had a long-term relationship with the philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), who was a renowned feminist existential philosopher and extremely important in the growth of the feminist movement. They had a huge and continuing influence on one another throughout their lives.

**Big idea**: *Human Nature: 'Existence precedes essence'* – see 'Useful quote' later.

**Main publication(s)**: *Existentialism and Humanism* (Sartre, 1946) and *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir, 1949).

**Useful quote**: 'What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards … there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it … Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself' (Sartre *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. P. Mairet).

'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley).

**About**: Before a matchbox is made someone (the maker) conceives of the matchbox beforehand, so its *essence precedes its existence*. Without the notion of God however (a notion Sartre rejected), human beings are different from matchboxes. Nothing has an idea of us before we are born. It is up to us to create ourselves and we do so with each action that we perform, large or small. In Sartre's words '… man is condemned to be free'. In other words, even the act of not choosing is itself a choice (you choose not to choose). For Sartre and de Beauvoir there is simply no way of getting out of making choices.

**Food for thought**:

- Compare the existential view of choice with that of determinism (see    Locke and Free Will  and  Spinoza and Determinism ).
- Does the science of genetics mean that Sartre was wrong about existence preceding essence? Is human nature fixed before we are born by our genetic make-up?
- Do actions speak louder than words?
- Are you a) what you want to be, b) what you think you are, or c) what you do?

# The Book of Life

**St. Augustine and Time**

**Biography**: St. Augustine (354–430) was born in North Africa, converted to Christianity in his 30s and eventually became the Bishop of Hippo. He was hugely influential in the establishment of the early Christian church and is probably most famous for his prayer about his early life: 'Lord, make me chaste, but not yet.'

**Big idea**: *Time* – 'So what is time? If no one asks me, I know; if they ask me and I try to explain, I do not know.' St. Augustine.

**Main publication(s)**: *Confessions* (400 CE).

**Useful quote**: 'If the future and the past do exist I want to know where they are. I may not yet be capable of such knowledge, but at least I know that, wherever they are, they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if, wherever they are, they are future, they do not yet exist; if past, they no longer exist. So wherever they are and whatever they are, it is only by being present that they *are*' (*Confessions*, Book 11, Chapter 14).

**About**: As with many ideas that we look at in philosophy, the idea of time begins by seeming simple but, when we stop to think about it, time is a remarkably difficult idea to make sense of. It is a complex idea that we take for granted. Philosophy is good at exposing these ideas. For Augustine, then, only the present exists. This view of time is known as 'presentism'.

**Food for thought**:

- What if . . . ? Assuming that tomorrow I will get up in the morning, is my getting up tomorrow true now? Or is it only true when I actually get up in the morning? This question derives from  Aristotle.
- Could time exist in an utterly empty space?
- What relationship do time and change have to one another? Can you have time without change?

# The Shadow of the Pyramid

**Aristotle and The Logical Syllogism**

**Biography**: Aristotle

**Big idea**: *The Logical Syllogism* from 'the father of logic'.

**Main publication(s)**: *Prior Analytics*.

**Useful quote**: 'A syllogism is a form of words in which certain things are assumed and there is something other than what was assumed which necessarily follows from things being so' (*Prior Analytics* Book 1, Chapter 1).

**About**: The syllogism is the starting place for all logic. Here is an example of a syllogism:

> All men are mortal; (Premise 1)
> All Greeks are men; (Premise 2)
> So, all Greeks are mortal. (Conclusion)

Philosophers use arguments, and some arguments are constructed using syllogisms. The first two sentences, known as *the premises*, are assumed. Then we can see if the last sentence, known as *the conclusion*, follows from the given premises. If the conclusion follows with necessity, then the argument is *valid*. If it does not follow, then it is *invalid*. We can test its validity by *iffing* the syllogism:

> If all men are mortal;
> If all Greeks are men;
> Does it follow that  all Greeks are mortal?

If 'yes' then it is valid, but if 'no' then it is invalid. Because Greeks fall into the class of men and because all men are mortal, it would follow that all Greeks, being men, will also be mortal. It is therefore a valid argument. Once we have established whether it is valid, *would the conclusion follow if the premises were true?* We can then move to the next stage by asking, *is it true*?

> Are all men mortal?
> Are all Greeks men?

Given the validity of the argument, then if we answer 'yes' to the premises then it would follow that all Greeks are indeed mortal. The two questions to ask oneself when presented with an argument are as follows.

1 Does it make logical sense?  If it to test this.
2 Is it true?  By asking this question you will find out what facts you may need to research and discover in order to answer this second question.

**Food for thought**:

- What if . . . ? If you were presented with an invalid argument would you need to ask if it is true? Try this:

  All cats are animals;
  'Tibbles' is an animal;
  Therefore, Tibbles is a cat.

- What if . . . ? If it turned out that Tibbles  was indeed a cat would that make the argument a good argument?
- Can you have a valid argument that is false? Try this:

  All sisters are brothers;
  All brothers are fathers;
  So, all sisters are fathers.

**Hint: spotting an argument**

People do not often speak in syllogisms so you need to be able to convert normal speech into a syllogism to be able to test for logical validity. Here's a useful hint for identifying the premises and the conclusion.

- The conclusion is the bit they will be trying to get you to agree to.
- The premises are the reasons they give in support of the conclusion.

For example, 'Animals do have rights because humans have rights and humans are animals.' The syllogism has been reversed so that the conclusion is at the beginning by the use of the word 'because'. The word 'because' is a good sign that the conclusion is at the beginning of the argument. Here's the spoken version translated into a syllogism:

  All humans have rights;
  All humans are animals;
  Therefore all animals have rights.

Is this valid? Is it true?

# Billy Bash

**Socrates, Plato and Weakness of the Will**

**Biography**: Socrates (died 399 BCE) was the son of a stonemason, teacher of Plato and is famous for having inspired Plato to write all that he wrote. He spent a great deal of time speaking with Athenians in the marketplace about philosophical questions. He was put on trial for corrupting the minds of the young and for preaching false gods, found guilty and sentenced to death.

**Big idea**: *Akrasia* (weakness of the will).

**Main publication(s)**: *Protagoras* by Plato (for Socrates' view) and *Republic* (book 4) by Plato (for Plato's view).

**Useful quote**: 'Socrates: No one does wrong willingly' (Plato *Protagoras* 345D). 'So it will be the business of reason to rule, having the ability and foresight to act for the whole, while the spirited principle ought to act as its subordinate and ally … When these two elements have been nurtured and trained to know their own true functions, they must be set in command over appetite, which forms the greater part of each man's soul and is by nature insatiable' (Plato *Republic* 441C).

**About**: Socrates thought that *weakness of the will* did not exist and that everyone acted according to what they thought was best for them. Anyone who has tried to stick to their New Year's resolutions may think, with Plato and Aristotle, that this was clearly false. But Socrates would say that if you fail to stick to a resolution then clearly you did not think it was for the best when compared to the other options; Socrates thought that you only choose what's not for the best through ignorance. When you *truly know* what is for the best you will choose it. Plato (and Aristotle) thought that Socrates' account didn't make sense. Plato thought that human desire must be understood in terms of conflict. He divided the mind into three to account for this apparent conflict. (This would later be the model adopted by Freud in his division of the mind into three parts: superego, ego and id.) Plato's three parts were: the rational part, the spirited part and the appetitive part. This can be understood to mean *reasoning*, *emotions* and *appetites*. Weakness of the will, for Plato, is where the reasoning part recognises that something is bad for us but where our appetite or emotion for or toward it is stronger than our reasoning capacity.

**Food for thought**:

- Which of the two accounts above (Socrates' or Plato's) do you find the most convincing?
- When you fail to resist a chocolate cake when on a diet have you displayed a

weakness of will, or do you not really, deep down, believe it to be for the best to resist the chocolate cake?

- What if . . .? You are lying on your bed knowing that you should get up and brush your teeth but can't be bothered. You finally decide that you won't bother to brush your teeth tonight and roll over to go to sleep. Then, almost automatically, you get up and brush your teeth. Is this weakness of will or strength of will?

# Thinking About Nothing

**The Pre-Socratics and Natural Philosophy**

**Biography**: The Pre-Socratic philosophers (between 600–300 BCE) were just that, philosophers that came before Socrates, who died in 399 BCE. Not much of their writings survive and we only know about them from other writers such as Plato and Aristotle who followed them. The main Pre-Socratics, in rough chronological order, are as follows.

- Thales – everything is basically 'water'.
- Anaxaminder – everything comes from 'the infinite'.
- Anaximenes – everything comes from 'air'.
- Heraclitus – everything comes from 'fire'.
- Parmenides – there is only one thing: 'that which is'.
- Zeno – famous for his paradoxes that attempted to prove that there is no such thing as change.
- Empedocles – came up with 'the four elements' – earth, air, fire and water – from which everything else is made up.
- Anaxagoras – everything contains something of everything else.
- Democritus– hypothesised the 'atom': that which cannot be divided. See Materialism.
- Pythagoras – thought that numbers and harmony were the basis of the universe

**Big idea**: *Natural philosophy* – the early scientists.

**Main publication(s)**: None of their work survives in its entirety but the surviving fragments can be found in *Early Greek Philosophy* by Jonathan Barnes.

**Useful quote**: 'If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants' (Isaac Newton 1642–172, *Correspondence of Isaac Newton vol. 1* H.W. Turnbull (ed), Letter to Robert Hooke).

**About**: Scientists are still trying to discover what the basic stuff of the universe is. Thales thought it was water and current scientists think it is 'superstrings', but the question these are answers to is basically the same. The Pre-Socratics

were deeply interested in the nature of change; this would later be codified in Newton's 'laws of motion'. Democritus was an early speculative physicist (atoms) and Empedocles paved the way for chemistry (the elements). Notice also how important mathematics now is in all the sciences and think of Pythagoras' view that maths is the basis of the universe. Isaac Newton himself was known not as a 'scientist' but as a 'natural philosopher'. The Pre-Socratics were among the first people on the planet to approach the questions of the cosmos and nature from a rational point of view, leaving behind them the mythological explanations that had gone before. This was one of the most important changes of thought to have happened in human history. Arguably, the history of European progress issues from the Pre-Socratic philosophers.

**Food for thought**:

  - What is change and how does it happen?
  - What is everything made of and how does it work?
  - Watch the world around you and wonder. From here you get a glimpse of the beginnings of rational thought in the history of human development.
  - What if … ? You removed everything, item by item, from an object in an empty space. What would you have left, if anything?

# Yous on Another Planet

**Leibniz and Identity**

**Biography**: Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) was a German philosopher who advocated a rational understanding of the world. He developed the mathematical principle of *calculus* simultaneously with Isaac Newton, and it is still a hotly debated issue who actually came up with it first.

**Big idea**: *Identity: 'Leibniz's Law'* – identity is about what makes things the same thing, and Leibniz's Law says that if two things are identical in every way then they must be one and the same thing. Also known as the *identity of indiscernibles*. (Now, there's a phrase that'll shut people up in the pub … or is it, stop people talking to you?)

**Main publication(s)**: *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding, 'On Primary Truths'* (roughly 1686)

**Useful quote**: 'The *primary truths* are those which assert the same thing of itself or deny the opposite of its opposite. For example, "A is A", "A is not not-A", or "if it is true that A is B, then it is false that A is not B". Also "every thing is as it is", "every thing is similar or equal to itself", "nothing is greater or less than itself", and others of this sort. Although they themselves may have

their degree of priority, nonetheless they can all be included under the name "identities'" (*Philosophy Essays* by G.W. Leibniz, ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber).

**About**: Leibniz's windy quote above basically says what many would regard as obvious: that everything is the same as itself, or, put logically, 'A = A'. Philosophers and scientists have often sought for a single principle from which everything else can be derived. Such a principle would be thought to have a god-like character, as it would be the starting point for all explanations. Frege and Russell thought for a time that this principle would be 'logic', or at least logical. Much earlier Leibniz had thought that the basic principle would be the logical law of identity: A = A, known affectionately as 'Leibniz's Law'.

**Food for thought**:

- Consider the following statements of identity:

  'Clark Kent is Clark Kent.'
  'Clark Kent is Superman.'

- Do these statements say the same thing? Everything that is true of Clark Kent is obviously true of Clark Kent. But is everything that is true of Clark Kent also true of Superman?
- Does this challenge Leibniz's Law, that everything is always the same as itself?

# The Ceebie Stories: Friends

**Aristotle and Friendship**

**Biography**: Aristotle

**Big idea**: *Friendship*. Of course, friendship itself was not Aristotle's idea, but he was one of the first philosophers to write about it and consider more deeply what friendship might mean.

**Main publication(s)**: *Nichomachean Ethics*.

**Useful quote**: 'The good person is related to his friend as to himself (for his friend is another self) … No one would choose a friendless existence on condition of having all the other good things in the world' (*Nichomachean Ethics* 1166a).

**About**: Aristotle thought there were different kinds of friendship.

- Friendship of utility, where you both have a mutual use from the relationship. For example, work colleagues.

- Friendship of pleasure, where you both derive pleasure from the relationship. For example, drinking buddies.
- True friendship, where you love the person for who they are.

**Food for thought:**

- How many friends do you have that fall into these categories?
- Are there other categories that Aristotle has missed?
- Can you provide a definition of friendship?

# The Ceebie Stories: The Tony Test

**Leibniz, Searle and Artificial Intelligence**

**Biography**: Leibniz, John Searle (b. 1932) is a contemporary philosopher who has written a great deal about this topic. If you are interested, you should read his thought experiment 'The Chinese Room' in the publication listed below.

**Big idea**: *Artificial intelligence* – can a machine think?

**Main publication(s)**: *Monadology* (Leibniz, 1714) and *Minds, Brains and Programs* (Searle, 1980)

**Useful quote**: 'Suppose there were a machine so constructed as to produce a thought, feeling and perception. We could imagine it increased in size while retaining the same proportions, so that one might enter as one might a mill. On going inside we should only see the parts impinging on one another; we should not see anything that would explain a perception' (Leibniz – *Monadology*).

**About**: In contrast to the view of materialism (see Hobbes and Materialism) Leibniz is saying that mechanical processes alone cannot produce thought. Searle agrees: 'The reason that no computer program can ever be a mind is simply that minds are more than a formal structure, they have a content.' A brain scan only tells us that *there is thinking*, it is unable to say *what is being thought*.

**Food for thought**:

- Does the argument above from Leibniz and Searle prove that materialism is false?
- Can science one day explain objectively  what it is like to be a bat  ?

# The Ceebie Stories: The Robbery

**Plato and Knowledge**

**Biography**: Plato

**Big idea**: *Epistemology* (*Knowledge): justified, true belief?

**Main publication**: The *Meno*.

**Useful quote**: 'Socrates: True opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain until one ties them down by giving an account of the reason why ... That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down' (*Meno* 97e).

**About**: Epistemology is the study of knowledge (from the Ancient Greek for 'knowledge' *episteme*). It is an important branch of philosophy being one of the big three: metaphysics, epistemology and ethics (see page 140). For an answer to the question 'What do we know?' ask a scientist. For an answer to the question 'How do we know?' ask a psychologist. But for the philosophical question around knowledge you have to ask the following question: 'How do we know that we know?' In other words, what justifications do we have when we say that we know something? Some say that there are none. They are known as *sceptics*. However, many philosophers have tried to offer an account of what the conditions would need to be to say that we know something. The most famous formulation of these conditions is known as the JTB theory (justified, true belief). This theory says that we know something when:

  a  we believe it,
  b  it is true, and
  c  we have good reasons for our belief that it is true.

It is a matter of controversy who first formulated the JTB theory but some have suggested that it first appears in Plato's *Meno* dialogue. When the character of Socrates says that 'true opinions' plus 'an account of the reason why' constitutes knowledge, some think this is the same as saying that knowledge is when you have a justified true belief.

**Food for thought**: Try to find a counter-example (an example that proves them wrong) to each of these statements.

  • 'If you believe something then you have knowledge.' (Counter-example: can you think of an example of a situation where someone believes something but they don't have knowledge?)
  • 'If you believe something that is true then you have knowledge.' (Counter-example: can you think of an example of a situation where someone believes something that is true but it is still not knowledge?)
  • 'If you have justified good reasons that something is true **and it is true** then you have knowledge.' (Counter-example: Can you think of an example of

a situation where someone has good reasons for thinking something is true, is justified in thinking they are good reasons, and it is true but it is not knowledge? If you can, then you will have disproved the JTB theory of knowledge. Well done!)

### Spinoza and Determinism

**Biography**: Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677) was a Dutch philosopher who spent his life working as a lens grinder. The fine glass particles eventually killed him. He turned down the offer of a professorship because he felt that fame would taint the quality of his philosophical work.

**Big idea**: *Determinism* – the view that everything is causally determined.

**Main publication(s)**: *Ethics* (1677)

**Useful quote**: 'Men are deceived if they think themselves free, an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. Human power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes' (*Ethics* trans. E. Curley).

**About**: According to determinists such as Spinoza every event is causally determined by everything that went before it. After all, science tells us that there are explanatory reasons for everything. This includes human actions. Our actions, therefore, including all our choices and decisions, are also causally determined by the host of preceding events. This is difficult stuff and also quite mind-blowing once you get your head around it. If determinists like Spinoza are right then there are all sorts of implications. If we don't really choose our actions, if they are all determined, then does that mean that no one can be held morally responsible for their actions?

**Food for thought**:

- Next time you do something, think about all the things that made you do it. List them.
- Do you freely choose to change the channel on the television? Do you freely choose what sort of people you like? Do you freely choose your moods? What do you think you can freely choose? Anything? Spinoza didn't think so.
- Read the section on  Sartre, de Beauvoir and Human Nature   on choice, and compare it with this section.
- What if . . . ? Imagine Sartre and Spinoza having an argument in the pub. Now imagine the conversation they might have. What do you think they would say? Try writing it out as a dialogue. Who do you agree with?

# The Ceebie Stories: The Lie

**Kant and Moral Luck**
**Biography**: Immanuel Kant
**The Big Idea**: *Moral luck.*
**Main publication(s)**: *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785).
**Useful quote**: 'Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will' (*The Groundwork of Metaphysic of Morals* trans. H. J. Paton).
**About**: The only thing of moral worth is a good will. That is an intentional will aimed at the good. For this reason Kant thought that it is impossible to do good accidentally. The long and the short of this is that, for Kant, there are no excuses for acting immorally. We all possess a sense of right and wrong and we should act out of duty to do good. Our economic circumstances or bad upbringing are no excuse for not doing good, though it is granted that it may be more difficult to do good under non-conducive circumstances. However, its being more difficult is not a reason to fail to act morally. So, for Kant, there is no moral luck: circumstances cannot affect the moral worth of an action. This seems harsh. But consider the following.
**Food for thought**:

- What if . . .? Imagine a scenario where you drink and drive and as a result crash into a tree but harm no one. Now imagine the same scenario but with one difference: instead of crashing into a tree you kill a child. Are these situations different from a moral point of view? Should you let yourself off the hook, morally speaking, in the first of these situations? What do you think Kant would say?

# To The Edge of Forever

**Zeno, Paradoxes and Infinity**
**Biography**: Zeno of Elea (early 5th century BCE) was one of many followers of Parmenides who settled in Southern Italy, Elea being a Greek settlement there.
**The Big Idea**: *Paradoxes and Infinity*. A paradox is when two beliefs or opinions crash into each other. Infinity is *foreverness*.
**Main publication(s)**: Aristotle's *Physics*.
**Useful quote**: 'The first argument asserts the non-existence of motion on the ground that that which is in locomotion must arrive at the half-way stage before it arrives at the goal …' (Aristotle on Zeno's arguments *Physics* 239B).

**About**: Zeno was obsessed with the paradoxes of infinity. This was not just a frivolous interest in word puzzles. Parmenides had recently introduced the practice of constructing arguments. He also argued that the world cannot be how it seems because the senses are not reliable. Therefore, when there is an apparent tension between how things seem to our senses and how things are according to a rational argument then, Parmenides argued, we should always go with the rational argument however counter-intuitive it may seem to our senses and experience.

So, for example, our experience tells us that an arrow can reach a target but a rational mathematical argument can be constructed to demonstrate that the arrow can do no such thing:

> Before the arrow can reach the target that lies 10 metres away it must first of all cover half that distance. It must cover 5 metres first. But before it can travel 5 metres it must first of all travel half that distance, which is 2.5 metres. And before it can travel 2.5 metres it must first of all travel half that distance, which is . . . etc.

As you can see, this line of reasoning will continue, using the mathematical principle of halving a distance, forever. It is for this reason that it seemed logical and reasonable to Zeno to conclude that the arrow cannot, in truth, reach the target as it would need to cross infinity to do so and this is impossible. Being a follower of Parmenides, Zeno thought that if it seems to us that it can reach the target then this must be false. He constructed many more paradoxical arguments like this many of which are famous and have puzzled philosophers and mathematicians ever since.

**Food for thought**:

- Learn how to construct a  Mobius Strip (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Möbius_strip)
- Research the strange world of fractals.
- What if . . . ? In Zeno's strange mathematical world of infinities if two people have a running race and one of them has a head start can the other runner actually overtake the runner with the head start? What would Zeno say?

# Where Are You?

**Descartes and Dualism**

**Biography**: Rene Descartes (1596–1650) was a French philosopher who was one of the pioneers at the forefront of a change in thinking that became known as 'The Renaissance', the rebirth of classical, rational ideas following

the dark period of the Middle Ages. Descartes is responsible for perhaps the most famous philosophical quote of all time, '*Cogito ergo sum*' (in Latin), or 'I think therefore am'. See if you can see how this quote applies to the discussion below.

**Big idea**: *Mind/Brain Dualism* – that the mind and brain are different things.

**Main publication(s)**: *Meditations on the First Philosophy* (1641)

**Useful quote**: 'On the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, insofar as I am simply a thinking non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, insofar as this is an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it' (*Sixth Meditation*).

**About**: Unfortunately, this is only the conclusion to a much more involved argument for the distinction between the mind and the body. See the publication above for the full argument. It might be fruitful to see the thought experiment we get from Leibniz about the thinking machine (Leibniz, Searle and Artificial Intelligence). See if you think the Leibniz argument adds anything to Descartes' idea. If a machine cannot think, as Leibniz thinks, and if our body is basically nothing more than a machine, then would this mean we need something else, like a mind or a soul, to make us capable of thinking?

**Food for thought**:

- If the mind and body (or brain) are different things then why is it that when we damage the brain it affects our personality so much?
- How can something like a thought actually causally affect something physical? To get an idea of the difficulty here consider a similar question: How could a ghost open a door?
- Try the following experiment: sit in a chair and look at a light switch. Attempt to turn it on or off by thinking alone. Is it possible? Now try to move your arm by thinking alone. Is it easier? Why does thought fail to move the switch but succeed to move your arm?

# Socrates, Aristotle and the Soul

**Socrates**

**Biography**: Socrates

**Big idea**: *The immortal soul.*

**Main publication(s)**: *Phaedo* by Plato.

**Useful quote**: Socrates (Soc): You tell me in the same way about life and death. Do you not say that to be dead is the opposite of being alive?

I do.

Soc: And they come to be from one another?

Yes.

Soc: What comes to be from being alive?

Being dead.

Soc: And what comes to be from being dead?

Being alive.

Soc: Then living creatures and things come to be from being dead?

So it appears.

Soc: Then our souls exist in the underworld. (*Phaedo* 71d)

**About**: For Socrates, the soul is a separate thing from the body; it exists independently of the body like the pilot of a ship. The body is like the ship and the soul is like the pilot. Using this model the soul can travel from body to body and because the soul is immortal for Socrates it does this over and over again. It is for this reason that Socrates said that philosophy is preparation for dying. It is why he also said that when we learn we simply 'recollect' what we have already learned (and forgotten) from previous incarnations of the soul.

**Food for thought**:

- What if . . . ? You have no memory of a previous incarnation of your soul. Does it make sense to speak of 'being the same soul'? Can you really have been Beethoven in a previous life if you can't remember? (This question comes from John Locke.)
- Would a soul be different from a mind? If so, in what way?
- Some think that there is just a body (with a brain). Some think that there is a body and a mind. Others think that there is a body, a mind     and a soul . Which of these pictures do you think makes the most sense?

**Aristotle**

**Biography**: Aristotle

**Big idea**: *The essential soul.*

**Main publication(s)**: *De Anima.*

**Useful quote**: 'The soul is characterised by these capacities: self-nutrition, sensation, thinking and movement … What is the soul? It is substance in the sense which corresponds to the account of a thing. That means that it is what it is to be for a body of the character just assigned. Suppose that a tool, e.g., an axe, were a natural body, then being an axe would have been its essence, and so its soul; if this disappeared from it, it would have ceased to be an axe, except in name' (*De Anima*, 413b and 412b).

**About**: For Aristotle, the soul is what you get when the essential features of a thing are present and working together. This can be thought of as like a light bulb. When it has all the essential features and they are working together you get light and the 'light' may be seen as analogous to the 'soul'. If an essential feature is removed from the light bulb – e.g. the glass, the gas or the filament – then the light will go out and cease to exist. Likewise, if a human being were to lose their essential features – the capacity for self-nutrition, sensation, thinking and movement – then the soul would 'go out' like the light.

**Food for thought**:

- Do you think Aristotle's soul continues after death?
- Which of these two pictures of the soul (Socrates' or Aristotle's) do you find the most comforting? Which of these two pictures do you find the most plausible?
- Do you think Aristotle would think that the word 'soul' is just another word for a 'mind' or something different?
- Would a soul be a   product of physical processes? Would it be   completely independent of physical processes, or would it be just the    same thing as the physical processes? What would Aristotle think? What would Socrates think?