Your Name

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Introduction to Western Philosophy

Western philosophy has traditionally been traced back to a Greek writer named Thales, who is famous for predicting the eclipse of 585 BCE. Plato mentions him in *Theaetetus* and Chaucer mentions him in “The Miller’s Tale.” In both instances, Thales is reported to have been walking across a field, observing the heavens, when he fell into a pit or well. Western philosophy originated in ancient Greece and is represented by its most influential schools of philosophy, those of Aristotle and Plato (Russell). The contemporary philosophy, Objectivism, discovered by Ayn Rand, has its roots in the ideas of Aristotle.

Questions are the essence of philosophy. The more difficult a question is to answer, the more ‘philosophical’ that question is. Philosophical questions can be taken as ‘proto-questions’ — questions with many answers, none of which have become permanently definitive or conclusive (yet) in human history. For example:

* What exists (what is existence? what does it mean to exist?)?
* What is reality? What are the mind and body?
* Who and what am I? What is the meaning of (my) life?
* What can I know? How can I know it?

Each of these philosophical (proto-)questions and others like them has many *philosophies* as answers to choose from. Anyone who believes their ‘philosophy of life’ can be fully presented in less than a lifetime is delusional. The answers to philosophical proto-questions are always unfolding and becoming, evolving, and transforming, always changing for each of us as individuals as well as for societies and cultures. For a mature and truly rational human individual, ‘their philosophy of life’ is a moving target: there are only two rational answers — ongoing communication (with frequent pauses for listening) or silence (broken only with caution and discretion after listening for a significantly longer spell).

Western answers to philosophical proto-questions tend to be analytic, positivist, and scientismic. Eastern answers lean more toward being, presence, and transcendence. One eschews or rejects metaphysics while the other accepts or embraces it. Each has elements of the other (mandorla, yin-yang, etc.), but these differences do very broadly apply.

Works Cited:

Russell, Bertrand. *History of western philosophy: Collectors edition*. Routledge, 2013.