

Referring to the idea of storytelling within a discipline, refer to at least THREE practitioners within any field of academic study and critically explore the way their work have aided the creation of a dominant view of how we see society today.

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We as a modern society have a relative understanding of how the world works around us. However, this was not always the case, some of the most asked questions in human history ask “what our purpose is” or “how do we fit into the world”. While many have asked these questions only a relative handful have conjured any possible answers. Some have looked for the answers within themselves and strived toward a higher meaning, whereas others looked outward toward the surround world to find belonging there. In present times we have developed ways of analysing both ourselves and the world around us. Each of these fields requires great minds to push the envelope and dare to look beyond what is already known. These minds have spanned across the years, from classical times to the modern era. Some such as the Greek philosopher Plato looked inwards to seek a perfection beyond reality that he could not attain, others like his most famous student Aristotle looked outwards to categorise the world as it is and find his place amongst it. While these ancient minds formed the basis for many ways of thinking to come, more modern takes are often required to make progress as knowledge stagnates with time. Stephen Hawking is one such mind who built upon these ways of thinking to concoct his own theories. All three of these figures shaped how we as a society perceive both ourselves and our surroundings and encouraged others along the same paths of thought. This essay will explore the thinking’s of these three great minds, how they perceived human society and the universe surrounding it, and how these views both intermingle and contrast with one another.

When talking about people who shaped humanity’s perception of society one of the earliest examples is Plato. The ancient Greek philosopher who is often referred to as the “Father of Western Philosophy” was one of the three major figures in the history of Greek philosophy along with his mentor Socrates and his student Aristotle. A wrestler in his youth and from a wealthy background he is thought to have founded the first university in Europe and was the perpetrator of numerous philosophical techniques and queries.

It is only through Plato’s writings that we have any understanding of Socrates’ own theories of the world as his mentor preferred not to record them opting to teach them verbally instead, though it is unknown how much of Plato’s recording of Socrates’ teachings are his mentor’s own thoughts and how much are Plato’s own theories using Socrates as a mouthpiece to gain legitimacy. Regardless of how they gained legitimacy, Plato’s theories on the world revolve around a sense of inward thinking; he believes that every object in reality is a reflection of a more perfect form beyond reality and that because reality is merely a reflection of this perfection that nothing in reality is perfect. He taught that the human senses are not entirely trustworthy because they only perceive the reflection and not the perfected form and that working to attain this perfection is the true way to happiness in life.

Perhaps Plato’s most famous dialogue, the Allegory of the Cave was designed to demonstrate this way of perceiving reality. In the allegory a group of people are chained to the wall of a cave from childhood able to perceive nothing but shadows that are projected onto a blank wall from a fire behind them. The people name the shadows and believe the shadows are reality when they are in fact imitations of the real thing. The allegory goes on to compare philosophers to people who have escaped and experienced the world outside the cave and therefore, reality. However, when the escapee returns to the cave from outside the other prisoners are too scared of accepting another reality to leave with them. The Allegory compares the real world to prison that only imitates the true reality and says that men like Plato are the only ones brave enough to dare to reach beyond our immediate senses.

In Ancient Greece philosophers would regularly debate matters of the world around them often disagreeing with each other’s ideas but at the time of Socrates there was not really a central location for these debates to happen, Socrates himself often debating regular Athenian citizens. This changed

when Plato founded The Academy in 387 BC. Thought to be the first university founded in Europe The Academy provided a place for people to learn from the great minds of the Greek world and be encouraged to concoct their own theories of existence and the world around them whether they matched their senior's consensus or not. This encouragement of free thinking and learning has been the basis for universities around the globe ever since.

Despite being a student of Plato for twenty years, Aristotle rejected many of Plato's ideas on the true nature of the world and how humanity is able to perceive it. Aristotle tended towards making his deductions by means of observation experience than theory or pure logic in the way that Plato and Plato's teacher Socrates were inclined to do. While Plato is considered the "Father of Western Philosophy" and his influence should not be discounted, it is arguable that Aristotle had the wider influence on society around the globe. It could be said that Aristotle is considered the "Father of Western Logic" (Humphreys, n.d.) At the time, he championed the idea of deduction over introspection; the idea that we see the world exactly as it is, and we should use our own perceptions and clues in the environment to come to a logical and reasonable understanding of the world. Where Plato says that every object has a perfect unattainable mirror and your senses only perceive the reflection, Aristotle says that there is no perfect mirror there is only the object and the world around it and your senses are the only way to perceive it.

He personally tutored Alexander the Great during his youth who used his teachings and knowledge imparted to him in order to conquer large areas of Asia and North Africa. Based on one account, Aristotle "encouraged Alexander to be a leader to Greeks and a despot to barbarians, treating the former as friends and the latter as beasts." (Alexander the Great: Aristotle | SparkNotes, n.d.) This led to him not only having a direct impact on his pupils, but an indirect influence on the world at large in the form of military stratagem.

He defined the logic of categorical syllogism. This is a way of presenting arguments and debates in which one presents three propositions: two premises and one conclusion. His most famous example of this style of logic is "Socrates is a man. All men are mortal therefore Socrates is mortal." (Sextus Empiricus., Annas and Barnes, 2007). This form of argument is used often in modern debates, highlighting his influence on contemporary academia. He founded the study of zoology being the first known individual to attempt to categorise animals by behaviour, size, shape, and other methods. His studies mostly focused on animals from around Greece, but it is also very likely his former pupil Alexander the Great sent him specimens from various other countries as he was known to bring other zoologists and botanists on his conquests. In addition to this, he made major contributions in other fields such as physics, psychology, meteorology, and ethics which still form the basis of these field's studies today. His ideas' reach extended to even Islamic regions where translations of his studies influenced great Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna and Averroes during the Islamic Golden Age.

To summarise, Aristotle challenged his mentor's views and offered a more extrospective alternative. It could also be argued he had a wider influence on history due to how his theories and teachings were utilised by his students and those inspired by his work.

Human understanding of the natural world has grown at an exponential rate since the times of Plato and Aristotle. Before the Industrial Revolution era only the smartest and well-off individuals were able to understand or invent new leaps forward in understanding to then distribute to the masses. Since the time of the Industrial Revolution science, technology, and society itself have progressed to the stage where concepts like Einstein's theories are taught to children of all ages and backgrounds, allowing a wider breadth of experiences to flourish in an academic environment. Someone who has

been allowed to flourish academically in this modern era thanks to these advancements is renowned theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking.

Born to a family of doctors in 1942 and obtaining his PHD in applied mathematics and theoretical physics in 1966, Stephen Hawking seemed exactly like the kind of person to thrive in an older era. But in 1963 he was diagnosed with early onset Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) that slowly paralysed him over time and rendering him unable to speak. If not for modern advancements Hawking would not have been able to continue his studies and produce not only major advancements in science but bring his own unique take on the world of philosophy too.

At the time of the late sixties and early seventies scientists understood the universe was expanding but not why it was doing so. Hawking proposed the first description of what we now know as the Big Bang. "There is a singularity in our past, which constitutes, in some sense, a beginning to the universe," Hawking wrote in the preface of his first book, "*The Large Scale Structure of Space-Time*" (1973). This attempt at understanding the universe can be construed as a modern take on Plato and Aristotle's own attempts to understand.

Similarly, to Aristotle, Hawking attempted to understand the universe from a perspective of deduction and perceiving the world around him. Focusing a lot of his study on the way black holes operated, in 1974 he discovered a stream of radiation that radiated out of the anomalies which would later be dubbed "Hawking Radiation". The discovery of Hawking Radiation changed a lot of what science understood about the universe. In 1988 Hawking's book *A Brief History of Time* was first published to phenomenal commercial success remaining in the Sunday Times Best Seller List for two hundred and thirty-seven weeks and selling over ten million copies. The book was written as an attempt to introduce readers who had no understanding of physics to the field in a way that was relatively simple to understand.

Stephen Hawking was a man of science before anything else but his attempts to understand how the world around him echoed the more philosophical scholars of times long before him. "My goal is simple. It is a complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all." (Hawking, 1989) However even though his line of thinking could be seen to echo philosophers of the past, Hawking himself believed philosophy to be an antiquated study that men of science had made obsolete. "Philosophy is dead. Philosophers have not kept up with modern developments in science. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge" (Hawking, 2011).

In conclusion, these three people could be argued to be some of the most culturally significant thinkers in terms of our place in the universe. Plato's introspective thinking led him to believe that nothing we perceived was perfect, merely a flawed reflection of an unattainable perfect truth. He said that we should not trust the senses to perceive the world around us and that true happiness was to be found by striving to attain this unattainable idea of perfection. He also said that most would not be brave enough to face the idea that what we perceive is not reality and only a few brave minds would dare to see the world as it truly is. This shows that since society is creation of our flawed perception society itself will never be perfect. Aristotle on the other hand rejected this notion and chose to accept the world for what it truly is. He sought to categorise the surrounding world so as to ascertain humanity's place in it. His acceptance of what the senses believed led him to form the basis for many scientific fields of study as he had an empirical world view. In contrast to Plato's view Aristotle saw society as a product of our environment, that something we as a people have the capacity to change. Finally Stephen Hawking could be seen as a modern product of both Plato and Aristotle. "Aristotle asks: "How does it work?" Plato asks: "Why does it exist at all?""

(2020) Stephen Hawking sought to answer both of these questions, but he did from a scientific point of view on the basis of fact as opposed to a philosophical standpoint. He stated that philosophy was outdated, and science was the modern interpretation of the ancient arts. His research showed us new evidence in how the world worked and as a result changed our thinking's of how we understand humanity and its place in the universe. This gave us a more modern and realistic take on how interpret society as it is merely a construct of our own being and not a naturally occurring phenomenon. Plato's teachings and ways of thinking ended up influencing the more traditional views of modern philosophy, whereas Aristotle's thoughts and theories have formed the basis for how more scientific minds think about the world. Although we have yet to see where Stephen Hawking's research and study will take us in the future, he managed to take pieces of both of these great mind's teachings and bring them together to create a more holistic view on the universe and how we as a society perceive it. An important lesson to be learned from these individuals is that one view or way of thinking is not sufficient to explain something as complex as human society or the universe it inhabits.

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