



# International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science

e-ISSN: 2544-9435

Scholarly Publisher  
RS Global Sp. z O.O.  
ISNI: 0000 0004 8495 2390

Dolna 17, Warsaw,  
Poland 00-773  
+48 226 0 227 03  
editorial\_office@rsglobal.pl

---

**ARTICLE TITLE** ON THE ORIGIN AND EMERGENCE OF PHILOSOPHY

---

**ARTICLE INFO**

Berrabah Omar. (2025) On the Origin and Emergence of Philosophy. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 2(46). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.2(46).2025.4734

---

**DOI**

[https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.2\(46\).2025.4734](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.2(46).2025.4734)

---

**RECEIVED**

08 January 2025

---

**ACCEPTED**

10 March 2025

---

**PUBLISHED**

15 May 2025

---

**LICENSE**



The article is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License**.

---

© The author(s) 2025.

This article is published as open access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), allowing the author to retain copyright. The CC BY 4.0 License permits the content to be copied, adapted, displayed, distributed, republished, or reused for any purpose, including adaptation and commercial use, as long as proper attribution is provided.

# ON THE ORIGIN AND EMERGENCE OF PHILOSOPHY

**Berrabah Omar**

*Kasdi Merbah University, Ouargla, Algeria*

---

## ABSTRACT

The question of philosophy and its origin is as old as philosophy itself; yet it is a question that is continually renewed with every shift in cultural centralities or as a sign of transition to a new civilizational cycle. This question reflects the problem of civilizational centrism, which many historians and philosophers articulate in their writing of history and in the production of ideas. In this article, we seek to examine the positions that address the origin of philosophy and endeavor to provide objective responses to this question. The aim is to eliminate manifestations of extremism and to clarify the points of ambiguity that have led to a lack of clarity in addressing this problematic issue.

---

## KEYWORDS

Philosophy, Greeks, East, Civilization

---

## CITATION

Berrabah Omar. (2025) On the Origin and Emergence of Philosophy. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 2(46). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.2(46).2025.4734

---

## COPYRIGHT

© **The author(s) 2025**. This article is published as open access under the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)**, allowing the author to retain copyright. The CC BY 4.0 License permits the content to be copied, adapted, displayed, distributed, republished, or reused for any purpose, including adaptation and commercial use, as long as proper attribution is provided.

---

### **Introduction:**

Greek philosophy was born, and with its birth emerged multiple problematics. Alongside this emergence spread the expression “*the Greek miracle*,” which points to the alleged uniqueness of this philosophy—considered by many historians of philosophy as an expression of the genius of Western humanity, especially since Greece is viewed as representing the West in contrast to the East, represented by Egypt and India. The French orientalist Ernest Renan (1823–1892) was the first to use this expression to signify the pure intellectual creativity that the Greeks were believed to have achieved.

This provocative expression leads us to raise the problematic of the originality of Greek philosophy within the framework of the civilizational conflict between East and West on the one hand, and between Greek civilization on the other hand and the Pharaonic and Indian civilizations. This means that this problematic cannot be addressed in isolation from the factors that led to its emergence. These factors are most likely not merely epistemological; rather, the historical and civilizational factors almost impose themselves when this issue is raised, and they are factors that find their own justification. Claims of civilizational superiority or tendencies toward centrism exist in all civilizations. Muslims themselves, for instance, fell under the burden of this questioning when orientalists dominated the intellectual scene with critical questions aimed at denying the existence of an Islamic philosophical production and favoring the view that Islamic philosophy was merely a direct transmission of Greek philosophy into Islamic thought.

The history of philosophy is philosophy itself, as Hegel expressed it. The historian of philosophy seeks to be objective, yet how can this be achieved when writing the history of philosophy from within an ideology—or ideologies—that govern the pen? These ideologies may be subject to the logic of history and geography, as was the case with Professor Mustafa al-Nashshar of Cairo University, who sought to strip philosophy of its purely Greek character and to defend the Eastern influence upon it. Yet these ideologies may also be independent of such logic, as in the case of the Egyptian philosopher Abdel Rahman Badawi, who argued in favor of the absence of any Eastern influence in what Greek philosophers wrote. On this basis, it is legitimate to ask: Was Greek philosophy born independently of the Eastern ideas that preceded it? And can we accept the

existence of a Greek philosophical production outside the framework of the reciprocal historical relationship between East and Greece?

Those who addressed this problematic can be divided into three groups: two groups adopted extreme positions in proposing solutions, while a third sought to move beyond extremism by offering a synthetic solution. It is as if, in this case, we are resorting to Hegelian logic, which holds that the resolution of problematics proceeds through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in a continuous process. The paradox here, however, is that we appeal to a Hegelian solution while Hegel himself belongs to the second group.

### First: Philosophy Emerged in Greece

Proponents of this view start from the assumption that creativity presupposes purity; one cannot imagine something genuinely new arising from mixed or hybrid foundations. On this basis, one can speak of Greek centrism—a centrism that attributes everything in the world, whether reason, philosophy, art, or religion, to a Greek origin. In contrast to the Greek stands the barbarian or the foreigner who does not understand the Greek language. Thus Aristotle (384–322 BCE), in his *Politics*, argues that the Greeks—and only the Greeks—combined courage and wisdom, which made them the best of races. He even acknowledges the role of wonder in the emergence of philosophizing among the earliest philosophers, foremost among them Thales (Aristotle, 1803).

Diogenes Laertius (3rd century CE) likewise mentions that the beginning of philosophy goes back to the Greeks, with whom the human race itself began—not philosophy alone. By this, he implies that barbarians or foreigners did not produce philosophy. This opinion surpasses even Aristotle’s view in its extremism (Diogenes Laertius, p. 33).

Hegel (1770–1831), in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, writes: “If, in the Christian world, religion and philosophy are considered separate, the opposite is true in ancient Eastern history, where religion and philosophy were regarded as inseparable” (Hegel, p. 48). This suggests that there was no philosophical intellectual production in the East independent of religious influence; rather, everything the East produced was purely religious. This view was reinforced by Nietzsche (1844–1900), who held that the Greek people had sages, while other peoples had saints. This confirms, in his view, a difference between the nature of Eastern thought—which remained religious—and Greek thought, which sought to separate itself from the temple and thus to think philosophically. Nietzsche regarded Eastern thought as mythological, whereas Greek thought was imbued with rationality. According to him, the East never reached a stage that enabled it to produce philosophy, despite historians’ efforts to demonstrate that the Greeks learned from and borrowed ideas from their Eastern neighbors. Some even went so far as to draw intellectual connections between Zoroaster and Heraclitus, Pythagoras and the Chinese and Egyptians, and Empedocles—connections that Nietzsche considered highly forced (Nietzsche, p. 40).

In a similar context—namely, in response to Eastern centrism, particularly Egyptian centrism—Daryush Shayegan argues that its proponents portrayed Aristotle as a plunderer of the Library of Alexandria who stole Egyptian philosophy and attributed it to himself, yet they failed to provide a single piece of evidence to support these claims. Meanwhile, Bertrand Russell moved toward affirming Greek creativity in both science and philosophy, linking the idea of creativity to the existence of Greek civilization, which he viewed as the source of this new intellectual production. In *The Wisdom of the West*, he writes: “Philosophy and science are Greek inventions, and the emergence of Greek civilization that produced this tremendous intellectual activity is one of the most magnificent events in history—an event that did not happen before and has never been repeated” (Russell, p. 22).

Aristotle points out, when discussing Thales, that he was the first to lay the foundations of natural philosophy. He attributes this to the fact that Thales relied on observation and the careful monitoring of the elements of nature and the manner of their formation, concluding that water is the origin of all things. Aristotle, however, raises the question of whether Thales was influenced by Eastern thought and answers it in the negative. The historian of science George Sarton likewise asks in *The History of Science*: “If the Greeks were indebted to their Eastern predecessors for this great debt, how is it that Greek progress was not faster than it actually was?” (Sarton, p. 273). This view, which is based on the inseparability of the history of science and the history of philosophy—given that such a separation was not possible at that time—raises a genuine problem. History reveals that scientific research was eventually surpassed in importance by philosophy, a fact we observe particularly in Socrates and Plato. Despite the momentum that scientific inquiry into nature had achieved before them, both philosophers chose instead to focus their investigation on the human being. Thus, the claim that Eastern peoples were scientists in mathematics and natural sciences does not in any way lead to the conclusion that the Greeks derived philosophy from them. Aristotle himself acknowledges, in his *Metaphysics*, the precedence of the Egyptians in the study of mathematical science, yet he does not recognize them as philosophers.

### Second: The Eastern Origin of Philosophy

History demonstrates that the ancient Eastern civilizations preceded Greek civilization in their emergence. Accordingly, proponents of the thesis of Eastern philosophy seek to establish that Greek philosophy appeared later than Eastern philosophy. This approach leads to an Eastern centrism that is no less extreme than Western centrism. One historian asserts that India's superiority is clearer in philosophy than in medicine, although the origins of things here too remain veiled, and any conclusion reached is no more than a hypothesis. This statement points to the superiority achieved by the Indians in philosophy compared to their Greek counterparts; however, such superiority remains hypothetical, especially when we investigate the problematic of origins. Émile Bréhier himself qualifies this view by stating: "If our history begins with Thales, this is not because we ignore the long prehistory in which philosophical thought was forged, but simply for a practical reason, namely the scarcity of documents and written inscriptions from ancient civilizations" (Bréhier, p. 10).

Philosophy was born in Asia Minor, where the first schools were established—the Milesian school, the Pythagorean school, and the school of Heraclitus. This indicates an effective contribution of the geographical East to the emergence of philosophical thought. Moreover, a close reading of the *Cratylus* reveals a questioning of the origin of the word *sophia*, which Plato considered foreign to the Greek tongue. This view is reinforced by Martin Bernal, who points to the existence of Greek terms whose origins can be traced back to Semitic roots, such as the word *qudos*, meaning the glory of the god, derived from the root *qds*, meaning "the sacred." In Arabic, everything that is sacred is likewise associated with the divine.

George Minois, the author of *The Church and Science*, raised a question regarding Plato, asking: "How could a pagan have been able, on his own, to arrive at a doctrine of such lofty character? Is it not possible that he derived it from Moses?" (Minois, p. 55). This question gains weight when we recall that Plato, in the course of his intellectual journey, visited Egypt. Saint Augustine himself was astonished by what he described as a strange similarity between what appears in the *Timaeus* and the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, leading him to hypothesize that Plato had access to the sacred Jewish text. The argument invoked here to establish a relationship between Plato and the East is that of travel, which can indeed have a profound influence in shaping relationships of intellectual influence.

Diogenes Laertius also reports that Plato purchased the books of Pythagoras from one of his disciples, which supports the validity of his connection with the East—if we accept the claim that Pythagoras himself was influenced by Eastern thought, based on the principle of transmission. Diogenes Laertius further recounts the example of Democritus, the Greek philosopher who studied under Magian teachers in theology and astronomy, and who was known for his travels to Egypt and Persia (Diogenes Laertius, p. 135).

### Third: Between the East and the Greeks

We observe that proponents of the "East first" and "Greeks second" positions distinguish philosophy from what is not philosophy in their attempts to prove that philosophy belongs to the Greeks, while what preceded them does not. This view is refuted by the author of *In Praise of Philosophy*, who states: "The pure philosophy by whose name Hegel excluded the East would also exclude a considerable portion of the Western past, and Hegel's criterion may apply only to Hegel himself" (Merleau-Ponty, p. 147). What may be described as Western modernity finds little support when we return to a classification of positions, for every history has its own form of modernity, understood according to its own logic. Conversely, positions are closely tied to interpretations. It is no secret to say that Nietzsche viewed the age of Socrates and Plato in the history of Greek philosophy as an era of decline and degeneration, whereas others considered it an era of philosophical flourishing.

The claim that the Greeks alone possessed rationality and philosophy is contradicted by historical accounts that reject the idea of history as the history of a single race. History, regardless of its field, is made by all human beings. The Greek distinction in theoretical thought occurred under specific political and cultural conditions that enabled them to shape this distinction. However, this distinction also contributed to the formation of a racist tendency—namely, the idea of superiority in Western humanity, or what is known as Western centrism.

### Conclusions

Ultimately, it is difficult to describe any intellectual model as a “miracle,” because a miracle presupposes a beginning from zero, an emergence out of nothing—something that is untenable in the Greek case. Greek philosophy emerged within a civilizational context, namely Greek civilization, which was built upon diverse cultural and social contributions. On the one hand, acculturation, influence, and mutual interaction are characteristics of all civilizations; therefore, it is not possible to speak of a purely Greek philosophy. On the other hand, it is possible to speak of a theoretical framework of thinking devised by Greek philosophers in which they excelled over thinkers of the ancient East, who were known for their practical thought. This distinction can be attributed to several factors, most notably the fact that the Greek individual despised manual labor and regarded it as a characteristic of slaves.

#### REFERENCES

1. Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Vol. 3, trans. Imam Abdel Fattah Imam. National Center for Translation, Cairo, 2014.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Suhail al-Qash. University Foundation for Studies, Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, 1982.
3. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Khalil Ahmad Khalil. University Foundation for Studies, Publishing and Distribution, 1st ed., 1996.
4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *In Praise of Philosophy*, trans. Qazhia Khoury. Oueidat Publications, Beirut–Paris, 1st ed., 1983.
5. George Sarton. *History of Science*, Vol. 1: *Ancient Science in the Golden Age of Greece*, trans. by a group of scholars. Dar al-Ma‘arif, Cairo, 3rd ed., 1976.
6. Aristotle. *Metaphysics*, trans. Jules Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire. Pocket Brodard et Taupin, 1991.
7. Émile Bréhier. *History of Philosophy*, Vol. I: *Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2nd ed., 1983.
8. George Minois. *The Church and Science: A History of the Conflict between Religious Reason and Scientific Reason*, Vol. 1, trans. Maurice Jalal. Dar al-Ahali for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Damascus, 1st ed., 2005.