

Questions

# Thinking

Answers



Raphael



Aristotle

Da Vinci

“The aim of art is not to represent the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance”

“Art is never finished, only abandoned”

Renaissance

Renaissance

**Raphael:**  
**The School of Athens: 1510;**  
 Stanza della Signatura,  
 Vatican City

**Vision of a Knight: 1504;**  
 National Gallery,  
 London

*The School of Athens* is a grand summary of the roots of western philosophy and thinking in one all encompassing eye-fel. Striding side by side in centre stage are Plato and his student Aristotle on his right. Plato's mentor Socrates is on the left providing another focal point. In keeping with his philosophy of ideal forms, Plato is pointing towards the heavens with his right hand whilst Aristotle is symbolically arguing the merits of a more earthbound empirical approach to knowledge by pointing downwards. The *Timaeus* and *Nicomachean Ethics* are tucked under the left hand of each philosopher, respectively. Socrates is depicted facing away from the centre busily questioning and examining life's riddles. Under the statue of Apollo (god of the Arts and divine inspiration) and grouped on the left are the ancient thinkers who, along with Plato, emphasised the intuitive aspect of thinking (including Pythagoras, Epicurus, Hypatia and Averroes). The Aristotelean aligned, empirically focused philosophers are grouped on the right (including Theophrastus, Ptolemy, Euclid and Strabo) under the watchful eye of Athena's statue – the goddess of reason and wisdom.

Sprouting from Socratic method/dialogue – which elevated the status of “the right question” to at least the level of “the answer” – we therefore have the two main ways of knowing our world: the ideal/theoretical and the empirical/practical. The constant interplay between these two processes and their followers has driven and framed history ever since.

The revival of ancient ideas and the embracing of eternal truths defined the Renaissance period, which itself became a platform from which our modern world was launched. Knowing, however, is not a substitute for choosing/doing: exemplified in *Vision of the Knight* (top right hand corner) where a sleeping knight has come to a fork in the road and is contemplating which of two opposing paths to take. A centrally placed laurel tree emphasises the merits of balance in all things.

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