

# Exactly what is...



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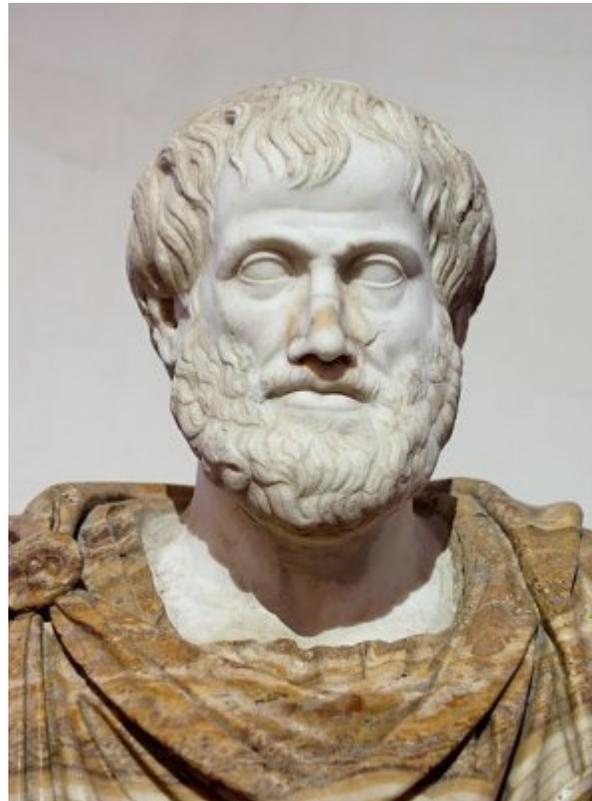
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## 👍 Philosophy of Time

All animals except humans live in a **continual present**, with no sense of the **temporal distinctions** of past, present and future. Our **consciousness of time** is therefore one of the most important distinguishing features of humankind, and one of the things that truly separates us from the lower animals. It comes as no surprise, then, that from time immemorial, philosophers, teachers and theologians have speculated on the **true nature of time**. Does time have a substance and, if so, what is it made of? How do we know that time really exists? Does time have a beginning and an end? Is it a straight line or a circle?

There is general agreement among philosophers that time is **continuous** (i.e. we do not experience it as stopping and starting, or darting about at random), and that it has an intrinsic **direction** or order (i.e. we all agree that events progress from past to present to future). There is



Philosophers have been grappling with the nature of time since the time of Aristotle and even before

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also a more or less general agreement that is it

**objective**, and not subjective or dependent on its being consciously experienced, which is borne out by the almost universal agreement on the time order of so many events, both psychological and physical, and the fact that so many different physical processes bear consistent time relations to each other (e.g. the rotation of the Earth, the frequency of oscillation of a pendulum, etc). However, even given that, many differing opinions and approaches to what time actually *is* have been put forward over the centuries.

The [ancient philosophy](#) of India and Greece was among the first to confront and question the real nature of many things that had been taken for granted (e.g. matter, space, nature, change, etc), and time was one of the many mysterious concepts they argued about at length. One major point of contention among the ancients was whether time is **linear** or **cyclical**, and whether it is **endless** or **finite**. (“Ancient philosophy”, for these purposes, is taken to include philosophical thought up to the late Middle Ages.)

During the Age of Enlightenment of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century, [early modern philosophy](#) began once again to consider questions of whether time is **real** and **absolute** or merely an **abstract intellectual concept** that humans use to sequence and compare events. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, philosophers began to question whether the **present** was really an instantaneous concept or a duration, and the **conventionalists** and **phenomenologists** all made their own contributions to the debate on time.

More recently, [modern philosophy](#) has continued to argue over whether time is **real** or “**unreal**”. But a whole host of other philosophical issues related to time have also surfaced, including whether time is **tensed** or **tenseless**, whether the **present** is instantaneous or a duration, whether the **past** and the **future** can be said to really exist, the manner in which objects **persist** though time, etc. Some of the novel ideas from **modern physics** have also generated new philosophical insights and hypotheses concerning the nature of time.

>> [Ancient Philosophy](#)

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