

The Sophists and Socrates

The Sophists

The enterprise of the early philosophers started to be put into **doubt** (different theories led to opposite conclusions).

The Presocratics were succeeded by the Sophists. These were “itinerant professors, who moved from city to city lecturing on various topics, including grammar, the interpretation of poets, the philosophy of mythology, religion and most importantly, **rhetoric** (the study of the ways of using language effectively)”.

The Sophists emerged in a period when the Greeks had come in closer contact with other peoples, not just the people of Persia, Babylon and Egypt, but also with other less advanced civilizations such as the Scythians and the Thracians.

The change from the Presocratics to the Sophists can be explained with reference to:

- a. A change in **subject-matter**
- b. A change in the **method** employed
- c. A change in **purpose**

The Presocratics studied **nature** and the **universe**; thus they can be called **naturalists** or **cosmologists**. On the other hand, the Sophists shifted the focus to **man**; thus they can be called **anthropologists** (this applies to Socrates too).

The Presocratics used mainly the **deductive method** (although they also made use of observation). The Sophists, on the other hand, sought to accumulate a large number of facts, and from these, they moved to draw conclusions, partly theoretical, partly practical. Thus their method can be called **empirico-inductive**.

The Presocratics were for **truth**, while the sophists were for **effectiveness** and **success** (moreover they believed that objective truth was not possible).

Protagoras: man is the measure of all things – problem with this sentence: a) man: does it refer to individual man or to community/ whole human species? b) things: objects of perception or ethical judgements? In the *Theatetus* Protagoras is depicted as saying that individual sense-perception is relative to the perceiver and that the wise man should substitute sound practices for unsound practices (however there is no true