

## AP Literature and Composition Culminating Process Paper: A Philosophical Approach to Literature

**Prompt:** Choose **four** works you have read this year for AP Literature, and compare and contrast how these texts use literary techniques to answer these philosophical questions:

1. *Either* What kind of world do we live in? *or* What is the nature of the universe?\*
2. *In turn*, how should humans behave?

\*You can either focus on the texts' human-created worlds (e.g.: worlds of conformity; worlds of corruption; worlds of competition; worlds of hierarchy, etc.) or you can widen the lens of your analysis to consider each text's respective depiction of the universe (e.g.: if it is a universe governed by fate, chance, free will, divine forces, etc.).

**Outside Source Requirements:** To supplement your arguments, you must incorporate at least **two** quotations from at least **one** scholarly source of philosophy. The outside source quotations can appear anywhere in your essay: as a "hook" to begin the essay, as a third piece of evidence in a body paragraph, or as a final thought in a conclusion paragraph.

Whichever philosopher you choose, your outside source *must* be a scholarly source. You may not directly cite websites like "Brainy Quote." ☺ You may cite a reputable scholarly source that summarizes the ideas of a philosopher as opposed to citing direct quotations from a philosopher.

If you end up finding a quotation from a philosopher that you like on a site like "Brainy Quote," but you are unsure of its origin, you may use a search engine or an AI generative language model to help trace that quotation back to a reputable source. Please be advised that AI language models can provide false information, so AI findings must always be tested.

The paper should be **6-8 pages** in length with equal attention devoted to each of the four literary texts. The paper is to be written in MLA format with a formal bibliography.

**Essay Outline** (worth 30 points) due by 11:59 p.m. **Friday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Final Draft** (130 points) due by 11:59 p.m. **Sunday, May 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Literature Choices—Choose four of the following texts:**

*Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro

*Wit* by Margaret Edson

*The Stranger* by Albert Camus

*Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco

*The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka

*Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

Your existential outside reading book

Your contemporary book club book

## Reputable Websites with Overviews of Famous Philosophers:

“Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy” <https://iep.utm.edu/>

“Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy” <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

Link to our MCHS Library Research Pathfinder for additional research leads:

<http://www.mchslibrary.org/philosophy-pathfinder.html>

## Famous Western Philosophers (A-Z)

**Aquinas, St. Thomas** (1225-74) The greatest thinker of the Scholastic School. His ideas, in 1274, made the official Catholic philosophy. He incorporated Greek ideas into Christianity by showing Aristotle's thought to be compatible with church doctrine. In his system, reason and faith (revelation) form two separate but harmonious realms whose truths complement rather than oppose one another. He presented influential philosophical proofs for the existence of God. His works include *Summa Theologica* and *On Being and Essence*.

**Aristotle** (384-322 B.C.) Greek philosopher, scientist, logician, and student of many disciplines. Aristotle studied under Plato and became the tutor of Alexander the Great. In 335 he opened the Lyceum, a major philosophical and scientific school in Athens. Aristotle emphasized the observation of nature and analyzed all things in terms of "the four causes." In ethics, he stressed that virtue is a mean between extremes and that man's highest goal should be the use of his intellect. Most of Aristotle's works were lost to Christian civilization from the fifth through the twelfth centuries. Among his writings are *Metaphysics*, *Politics*, and *Rhetoric*.

**Bacon, Sir Francis** (1561-1626) English statesman, essayist, and philosopher, one of the great precursors of the tradition of British empiricism and of belief in the importance of scientific method. He emphasized the use of inductive reasoning in the pursuit of knowledge.

**Descartes, Rene** (1596-1650) French philosopher and scientist, considered the father of modern philosophical inquiry. Descartes tried to extend mathematical method to all knowledge in his search for certainty. Discarding the medieval appeal to authority, he began with "universal doubt," finding that the only thing that could not be doubted was his own thinking. The result was his famous "*Cogito, ergo sum*," or "I think, therefore I am." His major works are the *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*.

**Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich** (1770-1831) German philosopher whose idealistic system of metaphysics was highly influential; it was based on a concept of the world as a single organism developing by its own inner logic through trios of stages called "thesis, antithesis, and synthesis" and gradually coming to embody reason. Hegel held the monarchy to be the highest development of the state. His works include *Logic* and *Phenomenology of Mind*.

**Heidegger, Martin** (1889-1976) German philosopher who studied with Husserl. Heidegger's own philosophy, which was influenced by Kierkegaard, emphasized the need to understand "being," especially the unique ways that humans act in and relate to the world. He wrote *Being and Time*.

**Hobbes, Thomas** (1588-1679) English materialist and empiricist, one of the founders of modern political philosophy. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes argued that because men are selfish by nature, a powerful absolute rules is necessary. In a "social contract," men agree to give up many personal liberties and accept such rule.

**Hume, David** (1711-76) British empiricist whose arguments against the proofs for God's existence are still influential. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume held that moral beliefs have no basis in reason, but are based solely on custom.

**Kant, Immanuel** (1724-1804) German philosopher, possibly the most influential of modern times. He synthesized Leibniz's rationalism and Hume's skepticism into his "critical philosophy": in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, he wrote that ideas do not conform to the external world, but rather the world can be known only insofar as it conforms to the mind's own structure. In *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant claimed that morality requires a belief in God, freedom, and immortality, although these can be proved neither scientifically nor by metaphysics. Finally, in his *Metaphysic of Morals*, he presented the concept of the categorical imperative.

**Kierkegaard, Søren** (1813-55) Danish philosopher, religious thinker, and extraordinarily influential founder of existentialism. Kierkegaard held that "truth is subjectivity," that religion is an individual matter, and that man's relationship to God requires suffering. He wrote *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling*.

**Locke, John** (1632-1704) Influential Founder of British empiricism. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke wrote that all ideas come to mind from experience and that none are innate. He also held that authority derives solely from the consent of the governed, a view that deeply influenced the American Revolution and the writing of the U.S. Constitution. His two *Treatises on Government* express his political thought.

**Machiavelli, Niccolo** (1469-1527) Italian Renaissance statesman and political writer. In *The Prince*, one of the most influential political books of modern times, Machiavelli argues that any act of a ruler designed to gain and hold power is permissible. The term *Machiavellian* is used to refer to any political tactics that are cunning and power-oriented.

**Marcus Aurelius** (121-180) Roman emperor from A.D. 161, and a proponent of the Stoic philosophy. His *Meditations* held that death is as natural as birth and that the world is rational and orderly. Although a great humanitarian, Marcus Aurelius persecuted the Christians of his time.

**Marx, Karl** (1818-83) German revolutionary thinker, social philosopher, and economist. His ideas, formulated with Engels, laid the foundation for nineteenth-century socialism and twentieth-century communism. Although Marx was initially influenced by Hegel, he soon rejected Hegel's idealism in favor of materialism. His *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital* are among the most important writings of the last 200 years.

**More, Sir Thomas** (1478-1535) A leading Renaissance humanist and statesman, Lord Chancellor of England. More was beheaded for refusing to accept the king as head of the church. Influenced by Greek thinking, he believed in social reform and drew a picture of an ideal peaceful state in his *Utopia*.

**Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm** (1844-1900) German philosopher, philologist, and poet. As a moralist, he rejected Christian values and championed a "Superman" who would create a new, life-affirming, heroic ethic by his "will to power." His works include *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*.

**Parmenides** (b. c. 515 B.C.) The founder of Western metaphysics. This pre-Socratic thinker held that "being" is the basic substance and ultimate reality of which all things are composed and that motion, change, time, difference, and reality are illusions of the senses.

**Pascal, Blaise** (1623-62) French philosopher, mathematician, scientist, and theologian. His posthumous "*Pensees*" ("Thoughts") argues that reason is by itself inadequate for man's spiritual needs and cannot bring man to God, who can be known only through mystic understanding.

**Plato** (c. 428-348 B.C.) Athenian father of Western philosophy and student of Socrates, after whose death he traveled widely. Upon returning to Athens, he founded an academy, where he taught until he died. His writings are in the form of dialogues between Socrates and other Athenians. Many of Plato's views are set forth in *The Republic*, where an ideal state postulates philosopher kings, specially trained at the highest levels of moral and mathematical knowledge. Plato's other works analyzed moral virtues, the nature of knowledge, and the immortality of the soul. His views on cosmology strongly influenced the next two thousand years of scientific thinking.

**Rousseau, Jean Jacques** (1712-78) Swiss-French thinker born in Geneva. Rousseau has been enormously influential in political philosophy, educational theory, and the Romantic Movement. In *The Social Contract* (1762), he viewed governments as being expressions of the people's "general will," or rational men's choice for the common good. Rousseau emphasized man's natural goodness.

**Russell, Bertrand** (1872-1970) English philosopher and logician influential as an agnostic and a pacifist. Early work with Alfred North Whitehead gave birth to modern logic; they coauthored *Principia Mathematica*. Russell changed his views numerous times but always sought to establish philosophy, especially epistemology, as a science.

**Sartre, Jean Paul** (1905-80) French philosopher, Bookist, and dramatist; one of the founders of existentialism. Sartre was a Marxist through much of his life. He held that man is "condemned to be free" and to bear the responsibility of making free choices. His primary philosophical work was *Being and Nothingness*.

**Schopenhauer, Arthur** (1788-1860) German post-Kantian philosopher who held that although irrational will is the driving force in human affairs, it is doomed not to be satisfied. He believed that only art and contemplation could offer escape from determinism and pessimism. Schopenhauer strongly influenced Nietzsche, Freud, Tolstoy, Proust, and Thomas Mann. He wrote *The World as Will and Representation*.

**Socrates** (c. 470-399 B.C.) Athenian philosopher who allegedly wrote down none of his views, supposedly from his belief that writing distorts ideas. His chief student, Plato, is the major source of knowledge about his life. Socrates questioned Athenians about their moral, political, and religious beliefs, as depicted in Plato's dialogues; his questioning technique, called dialectic, has greatly influenced Western philosophy. Socrates is alleged to have said that "the unexamined life is not worth living." In 399 B.C., he was brought to trial on charges of corrupting the youth and religious heresy. Sentenced to die, he drank poison.

**Spinoza, Benedict (Baruch)** (1623-77) Dutch-born philosopher expelled from the Amsterdam Jewish community for heresy in 1656; he was attacked by Christian theologians 14 years later. In *Ethics*, Spinoza presents his views in a mathematical system of deductive reasoning. A proponent of monism, he held - in contrast to Descartes - that mind and body are aspects of a single substance, which he called God or nature.

**Voltaire (Francois Marie Arouet)** (1694-1778) French philosopher, essayist, and historian; one of the major thinkers of the Enlightenment. A Deist who was anti-Christian, Voltaire widely advocated tolerance of liberal ideas and called for positive social action. His Book *Candide* is a parody of the optimism of Leibniz.

**Whitehead, Alfred North** (1861-1947) British philosopher and mathematician who worked with Bertrand Russell. Whitehead tried to integrate twentieth-century physics into a metaphysics of nature.

**Wittgenstein, Ludwig** (1889-1951) Austrian-born philosopher who spent the last 20 years of his life in England. Wittgenstein was one of the most influential philosophers of the century, primarily through his emphasis on the importance of the study of language. His *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* influenced analytic philosophy. His later views emphasized that philosophic problems are often caused by linguistic confusions.

## **Famous Eastern Philosophers**

**Confucius** (551-479 BCE), according to Chinese tradition, was a thinker, political figure, educator, and founder of the *Ru* School of Chinese thought. His teachings, preserved in the *Lunyu* or *Analects*, form the foundation of much of subsequent Chinese speculation on the education and comportment of the ideal man, how such an individual should live his life and interact with others, and the forms of society and government in which he should participate. Fung Yu-lan, one of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century authorities on the history of Chinese thought, compares Confucius' influence in Chinese history with that of Socrates in the West.

**Siddhartha Gautama** The Buddha (fl. circa 450 BCE) is the individual whose teachings form the basis of the Buddhist tradition. These teachings, preserved in texts known as the *Nikāyas* or *Āgamas*, concern the quest for liberation from suffering. While the ultimate aim of the Buddha's teachings is thus to help individuals attain the good life, his analysis of the source of suffering centrally involves claims concerning the nature of persons, as well as how we acquire knowledge about the world and our place in it. These teachings formed the basis of a philosophical tradition that developed and defended a variety of sophisticated theories in metaphysics and epistemology.

**Laozi** The name “Laozi” is best taken to mean “Old (*lao*) Master (*zi*),” and Laozi the ancient philosopher is said to have written a short book, which has come to be called simply the *Laozi*. When the *Laozi* was recognized as a “classic” (*jing*) — that is, accorded “canonical” status, so to speak, on account of its profound insight and significance — it acquired a more exalted and hermeneutically instructive title, *Daodejing* (*Tao-te ching*), commonly translated as the “Classic of the Way and Virtue.” Next to the Bible, the *Daodejing* is the most translated work in world literature. It is concerned with the Dao or “Way” and how it finds expression in “virtue” (*de*), especially through what the text calls “naturalness” (*ziran*) and “nonaction” (*wuwei*).