

## 2.5 How do we know what we know? – A Greek Perspective

**Instructions:** The philosophers of ancient Greece, especially Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, were very concerned with the nature of truth and the process by which people acquire and can be certain about knowledge. In these statements, adapted from the original quotes, they discuss some of their beliefs and questions about the nature of knowledge and how we know what we know. After you read the passages, clarify your understanding of what they are saying, and be prepared to explain your views on the nature of truth and knowledge.



**The Parthenon, on top of the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, is where Socrates and his students met.**

### **A. Socrates questions the existence of absolute truth in a dialogue with Cratylus**

(<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/cratylus.html>, accessed November 6, 2018).

I suspect the study of what truly really exists is beyond the ability of you and me to determine. Knowledge of things does not just come from naming them. To acquire true knowledge, things must be carefully studied and investigated. One problem in acquiring true knowledge is that everything seems to be in a state of flux. If things are constantly changing, how can we claim to have true knowledge about them. Is it possible to determine whether there is some eternal unchanging nature in things?

### **B. Plato compares knowledge with opinion in *The Republic***

(<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.7.vi.html>, accessed November 6, 2018).

When a person looks at objects after the light of day is no longer shining, we see dimly, and are nearly blind. But when we examine objects on which the sun shines, we see them clearly. The soul is like the eye. When the soul looks at something that is true, it understands this truth and shines with intelligence. But when the truth is obscured by twilight the soul only sees opinion. It goes blinking about, and is first of one opinion and then of another, and seems to have no intelligence.

### **C. Aristotle discusses whether objects or truth exist independently of human knowledge.**

(<http://aristotle.thefreelibrary.com/Categories/2-1>, accessed November 6, 2018). It is true that if an object does not exist, there can be no knowledge about it. There will no longer be anything to know. However, it is equally true that, an object may exist even if people do not have knowledge about it.