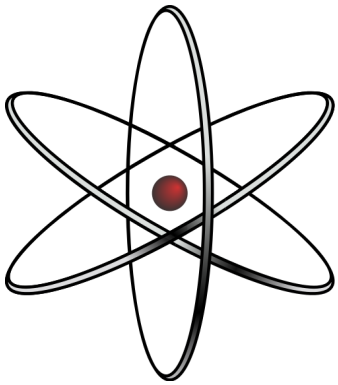
From Democritus to Dalton



More than 2,400 years ago, the Greek philosopher Democritus began thinking about how many times matter could be divided. He proposed that there were, in fact, tiny, indivisible pieces of matter that he called “atomos,” meaning “not to be cut.”

This idea languished for about 2,000 years until scientists in the 19th and 20th centuries gathered empirical evidence to support and refine it.

Ideas that prevailed between Democritus and early 19th century scientist John Dalton:

JOHN DALTON
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Biography

What knowledge did Dalton contribute, and how?

When did we first have idea that there might be matter in units tinier than atom, and how did scientists go about proving it?