Ancient Greek Philosophy

Introduction

Something unusual happened in Greece and the Greek colonies of the Aegean Sea some 2,500 years ago. Whereas the previous great cultures of the Mediterranean had used mythological stories of the gods to explain the operations of the world and of the self, some of the Greeks began to discover new ways of explaining things. Instead of reading their ideas into, or out of, ancient scriptures or poems, they began to use reason, contemplation, and sensory observation to make sense of reality.

The story as we know it began with the Greeks living on the coast of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Colonists such as Thales tried to find the one common element in the diversity of nature. Subsequent thinkers such as Anaximenes sought not only to find this one common element, but also to find the process by which one form changes into another. Other thinkers, such as Pythagoras, turned to the nature of form itself rather than the basic stuff that takes on a particular form. With Socrates the pursuit of knowledge turned inward as he sought not to understand the world, but himself. His call to "know thyself," together with his uncompromising search for truth, inspired generations of thinkers. With the writings of Plato and Aristotle Ancient Greek thought reached its zenith. These giants of human thought developed all-embracing systems that explained both the nature of the universe and the humans who inhabit it.

These lovers of wisdom, or *philosophers*, came to very different conclusions and often spoke disrespectfully of one another. Some held the universe to be one, while others insisted that it must be many. Some believed that human knowledge was capable of understanding virtually everything about the world and the self, while others thought that it was not possible to have any knowledge at all. But despite all their differences, there is a thread of continuity, a continuing focus: the *human* attempt to understand the world and the self, using *human* reason. This fact distinguishes these philosophers from the great minds that preceded them.

The philosophers of ancient Greece have fascinated thinking persons for centuries, and their writings have been one of the key influences on the development of Western civilization. The work of Plato and Aristotle, especially, has defined the questions and suggested many of the answers for subsequent generations. As the great Greek statesman, Pericles, sagely predicted, "Future ages will wonder at us, as the present age wonders at us now."

Socrates and Plato

Biography

SOCRATES (470-399 B.C.) and PLATO (428/7-348/7 B.C.)

Socrates has fascinated and inspired men and women for over two thousand years. All five of the major "schools" of ancient Greece (Academics, Peripatetics, Epicureans, Stoics, and Cynics) were influenced by his thought. Some of the early Christian thinkers, such as Justin Martyr, considered him a "proto-Christian," while others, such as St. Augustine (who rejected this view) still expressed deep admiration for Socrates' ethical life. More recently, existentialists have found in Socrates' admonition "know thyself" an encapsulation of their thought, and opponents of unjust laws have seen in Socrates' trial a blueprint for civil disobedience. In short, Socrates is one of the most admired men who ever lived.

The Athens into which Socrates was born in 470 B.C. was a city still living in the flush of its epic victory over the Persians, and it was bursting with new ideas. The playwrights Euripides and Sophocles were young boys, and Pericles, the great Athenian democrat, was still a young man. The Parthenon's foundation was laid when Socrates was twenty-two, and its construction was completed fifteen years later.

Socrates was the son of Sophroniscus, a sculptor, and of Phaenarete, a midwife. As a boy, Socrates received a classical Greek education in music, gymnastics, and grammar (or the study of language), and he decided early on to become a sculptor like his father. Tradition says he was a gifted artist who fashioned impressively simple statues of the Graces. He married a woman named Xanthippe, and together they had three children. He took an early interest in the developing science of the Milesians, and then he served for a time in the army.

When he was a middle-aged man, Socrates' friend, Chaerephon, asked the oracle at Delphi "if there was anyone who was wiser than Socrates." For once the mysterious oracle gave an unambiguous answer: "No one." When Socrates heard of the incident, he was confused. He knew that he was not a wise man. So he set out to find a wiser man to prove the answer wrong. Socrates later described the
method and results of his mission:

> So I examined the man—I need not tell you his name, he was a politician—but this was the result. Athenians. When I conversed with him I came to see that, though a great many persons, and most of all he himself, thought that he was wise, yet he was not wise. Then I tried to prove to him that he was not wise, though he fancied that he was. By so doing I made him indignant, and many of the bystanders. So when I went away, I thought to myself, "I am wiser than this man: neither of us knows anything that is really worth knowing, but he thinks that

> he has knowledge when he has not, while I, having no knowledge, do not think that I have. I seem, at any rate, to be a little wiser than he is on this point: I do not think that I know what I do not know." Next I went to another man who was reputed to be still wiser than the last, with exactly the same result. And there again I made him, and many other men, indignant. (*Apology* 21c)

As Socrates continued his mission by interviewing the politicians, poets, and artisans of Athens, young men followed along. They enjoyed seeing the authority figures humiliated by Socrates' intense questioning. Those in authority, however, were not amused. Athens was no longer the powerful, self-confident city of 470 B.C., the year of Socrates' birth. An exhausting succession of wars with Sparta (the Peloponnesian Wars) and an enervating series of political debacles had left the city narrow in vision and suspicious of new ideas and of dissent. In 399 B.C., Meletus and Anytus brought an indictment of impiety and corrupting the youth against Socrates. As recorded in the *Apology*, the Athenian assembly found him guilty by a vote of 281 to 220 and sentenced him to death. His noble death is described incomparably in the closing pages of the *Phaedo* by Plato.

Socrates wrote nothing, and our knowledge of his thought comes exclusively from the report of others. The playwright Aristophanes (455–375 B.C.) satirized Socrates in his comedy *The Clouds.* His caricature of Socrates as a cheat and charlatan was apparently so damaging that Socrates felt compelled to offer a rebuttal before the Athenian assembly (see the *Apology,* following). The military general Xenophon (ca. 430–350 B.C.) honored his friend Socrates in his *Apology of Socrates,* his *Symposium,* and, later, in his *Memorabilia* ("Recollections of Socrates"). In an effort to defend his dead friend's memory, Xenophon's writings illumine Socrates' life and character. Though born fifteen years after the death of Socrates, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) left many fascinating allusions to Socrates in his philosophic works, as did several later Greek philosophers. But the primary source of our knowledge of Socrates comes from one of those young men who followed him: Plato.

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Plato was probably born in 428/7 B.C. He had two older brothers, Adeimantus and Glaucon, who appear in Plato's *Republic,* and a sister, Potone. Though he may have known Socrates since childhood, Plato was probably nearer twenty when he came under the intellectual spell of Socrates. The death of Socrates made an enormous impression on Plato and contributed to his call to bear witness to posterity of "the best, . . . the wisest and most just" person that he knew (*Phaedo,* 118). Though Plato was from a distinguished family and might have followed his relatives into politics, he chose philosophy.

Following Socrates' execution, the twenty-eight-year-old Plato left Athens and traveled for a time. He is reported to have visited Egypt and Cyrene—though some scholars doubt this. During this time he wrote his early dialogues on Socrates' life and teachings. He also visited Italy and Sicily, where he became the friend of Dion, a relative of Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, Sicily.

On returning to Athens from Sicily, Plato founded a school, which came to be called the Academy. One might say it was the world's first university, and it endured as a center of higher learning for nearly one thousand years, until the Roman emperor Justinian closed it in A.D. 529. Except for two later trips to Sicily, where he unsuccessfully sought to institute his political theories, Plato spent the rest of his life at the Athenian Academy. Among his students was Aristotle. Plato died at eighty in 348/7 B.C.

Plato's influence was best described by the twentieth-century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead when he said, "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."

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It is difficult to separate the ideas of Plato from those of his teacher, Socrates. In virtually all of Plato's dialogues, Socrates is the main character, and it is possible that in the early dialogues Plato is recording his teacher's actual words. But in the later dialogues, "Socrates" gives Plato's views—views that, in some cases, in fact, the historical Socrates denied.

The first four dialogues presented in this text describe the trial and death of Socrates and are arranged in narrative order. The first, the *Euthyphro,* takes place as Socrates has just learned of the indictment against him. He strikes up a conversation with a "theologian" so sure of his piety that he is prosecuting his own father for murder. The dialogue moves on, unsuccessfully, to define piety. Along the way, Socrates asks a question that has vexed philosophers and theologians for centuries: Is something good because the gods say it is, or do the gods say it is good because it is?

The next dialogue, the *Apology,* is generally regarded as one of Plato's first, and as eminently faithful to what Socrates said at his trial on charges of impiety and corruption of youth. The speech was delivered in public and heard by a large audience; Plato has Socrates mention that Plato was present; and there is no need to doubt the historical veracity of the speech, at least in essentials. There are two breaks in the narrative: one after Socrates' defense (during which the Athenians vote "guilty") and one after Socrates proposes an alternative to the death penalty (during which the Athenians decide on death). This dialogue includes Socrates' famous characterization of his mission and purpose in life.

In the *Crito,* Plato has Crito visit Socrates in prison to assure him that his escape from Athens has been well prepared and to persuade him to consent to leave. Socrates argues that one has an obligation to obey the state even when it orders one to suffer wrong. That Socrates, in fact, refused to leave is certain; that he used the arguments Plato ascribes to him is less certain. In any case, anyone who has read the *Apology* will agree that after his speech Socrates could not well escape.

The moving account of Socrates' death is given at the end of the *Phaedo,* the last of our group of dialogues. There is common agreement that this dialogue was written much later than the other three and that the earlier part of the dialogue, with its Platonic doctrine of

Forms and immortality, uses “Socrates” as a vehicle for Plato’s own ideas. These first four dialogues are given in the F.J. Church translation.

There are few books in Western civilization that have had the impact of Plato’s *Republic*—aside from the Bible, perhaps none. Like the Bible, there are also few books whose interpretation and evaluation have differed so widely. Apparently it is a description of Plato’s ideal society: a utopian vision of the just state, possible only if philosophers were kings. But some (see the following suggested readings) claim that its purpose is not to give a model of the ideal state, but to show the impossibility of such a state and to convince aspiring philosophers to shun politics. Evaluations of the *Republic* have also varied widely: from the criticisms of Karl Popper, who denounced the *Republic* as totalitarian, to the admiration of more traditional interpreters, such as Francis MacDonald Cornford and Gregory Vlastos.

Given the importance of this work and the diversity of opinions concerning its point and value, it was extremely difficult to decide which sections of the *Republic* to include in this series. I chose to include the discussion of justice from Books I and II, the descriptions of the guardians and of the “noble lie” from Book III, the discussions of the virtues and the soul in Book IV, the presentations of the guardians’ qualities and lifestyles in Book V, and the key sections on knowledge (including the analogy of the line and the myth of the cave) from the end of Book VI and the beginning of Book VII. I admit that space constraints have forced me to exclude important sections. Ideally, the selections chosen will whet the student’s appetite to read the rest of this classic. I am pleased to offer the *Republic* in the outstanding new translation by Joe Sachs.

The marginal page numbers are those of all scholarly editions, Greek, English, German, or French.

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For studies of Socrates, see the classic A.E. Taylor, *Socrates: The Man and His Thought* (London: Methuen, 1933); the second half of Volume III of W.K.C. Guthrie, *The History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Hugh H. Benson, *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Anthony Gottlieb, *Socrates* (London: Routledge, 1999); Christopher Taylor’s pair of introductions, *Socrates* and *Socrates: A Very Short Introduction* (both Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 and 2000); Nalin Ranasingle, *The Soul of Socrates* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000); and James Colaiazo, *Socrates Against Athens* (London: Routledge, 2001). For collections of essays, see Gregory Vlastos, ed., *The Philosophy of Socrates* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971); Hugh H. Benson, ed., *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Terence Irwin, ed., *Socrates and His Contemporaries* (Hamden, CT: Garland Publishing, 1995); and the multivolume William J. Prior, ed., *Socrates* (Oxford: Routledge, 1996); and Lindsay Judson and Vassilis Karasmanis, eds., *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For discussions of the similarities and differences between the historical Socrates and the “Socrates” of the Platonic dialogues,

see Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), especially Chapters 2 and 3.

Books about Plato are legion. Once again the work of W.K.C. Guthrie is sensible, comprehensive, yet readable. See Volumes IV and V of his *The History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975 and 1978). Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1933); and G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London: Methuen, 1935) are classic treatments of Plato, while Robert Brumbaugh, *Plato for a Modern Age* (New York: Macmillan, 1964); I.M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines,* two volumes (New York: Humanities Press, 1963–1969), R.M. Hare, *Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); David J. Melling, *Understanding Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Bernard Williams, *Plato* (London: Routledge, 1999); Julius Moravcsik, *Plato and Platonism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000); and Gail Fine, *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) are more recent studies. For collections of essays, see Gregory Vlastos, ed., *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays,* two volumes (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971); Richard Kraut, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Nancy Tuana, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (College Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Terence Irwin, ed., *Plato's Ethics* and *Plato's Metaphysics and Epistemology* (both Hamden, CT: Garland Publishing, 1995); Gregory Vlastos, ed., *Studies in Greek Philosophy, Volume II: Socrates, Plato, and Their Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Nicholas D. Smith, ed., *Plato: Critical Assessments* (London: Routledge, 1998); Gail Fine, ed., *Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Gerald A. Press, ed., *Who Speaks for Plato?* (Lanham, MD: Rownan and Littlefield, 2000). C.D.C. Reeve, *Socrates in the Apology* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1989) provides insights on this key dialogue. For further reading on the *Republic,* see Nicholas P. White, *A Companion to Plato's* Republic (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1979); Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's* Republic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Nickolas Pappas, *Routledge Guidebook to Plato and the* Republic (Oxford: Routledge, 1995); Daryl Rice, *A Guide to Plato's* Republic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Richard Kraut, ed., *Plato's* Republic: *Critical Essays* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 1997); Sean Sayers, *Plato's* Republic: *An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Stanley Rosen, *Plato's* Republic (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Luke Purshouse, *Plato's* Republic: *A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2006); and C.R.F. Ferrari, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's* Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Gabriela Roxanna Carone, *Plato's Cosmology and Its Ethical Dimensions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) examine several dialogues while thoroughly exploring Plato's ethical thought. Finally, for unusual interpretations of Plato and his work, see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia,* Vols. II and III, translated by Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939–1943); Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies; Volume I: The Spell of Plato* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962); and Allan Bloom's interpretive essay in Plato, *Republic,* translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

Socrates, *Euthyphro*

1. To Socrates question about the nature of piety, Euthyphro initally
    a. gives a clear definition, but cannot come up with examples.
    b. claims he knows exactly what it is, but only gives examples.
    c. claims that he is unsure what it is, but develops a clear definition based on his conversation with Socrates.
    d. claims he is unsure what it is, and never does get an adequate definition.

Answer: b
Page Reference: 11

2. Socrates argues that piety and what is pleasing to the gods are
    a. essentially the same thing.
    b. experientially the same thing.
    c. practically the same thing.
    d. different things.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 12

Essay Questions

1. Socrates asks Euthyphro whether "the gods love piety because it is pious," or is it pious because the gods love it? Explain the significance and the implications of this distinction?

Apology

1. In his defense, Socrates acknowledges that the most dangerous accusations against him are the
    a. charges of Anytus and his supporters.
    b. actions of the youth of Athens who enjoy seeing their superiors mocked.
    c. claims of impiety.
    d. reputation he developed because of Aristophanes and other Athenian satirists.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 21

2. In his attempt to find someone wiser than himself, Socrates comes to the conclusion that wisdom
    a. is not worth seeking.
    b. consists of knowing what one does and does not know.
    c. belongs only to the lower class of merchants and craftsmen.
    d. was given to him by the god at Delphi.

Answer: b
Page Reference: 24

3. In answer to Meletus' claim that Socrates is deliberately corrupting the youth, Socrates argues that he would never intentionally harm the young men because
    a. it is morally wrong to lead a person astray.
    b. he didn't realize that he was a bad influence.
    c. if he were to harm another person he would only be hurting himself.
    d. he is the only person in Athens who really cares about their education.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 26-27

4. Socrates defends himself against charges of impiety by arguing that
    a. his belief in supernatural activities implies a belief in gods.
    b. the gods do not exist.
    c. his new religion of the supernatural includes belief in gods.
    d. Socrates is a follower of Anaxagoras who believes in the gods.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 27-28

5. Socrates concludes his defense by stating that all of his arguments are intended to defend
    a. the god of Delphi because the god will lose a faithful follower.
    b. himself because he is a great philosopher and deserves to live.
    c. the city because Socrates is the gods' gift to Athens.
    d. himself because he is afraid of dying.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 30

Essay Questions

1. The youth of Socrates' day (as today) enjoyed seeing authority mocked. Wasn't Socrates, in fact, guilty to a certain extent by making the authorities look foolish in front of the young men of Athens?

Crito

1. Which of the following is not an argument that Crito employs in his attempt to convince Socrates to flee Athens?

a. Everyone in Athens wants him dead.
b. The nearby cities would be honored to take him in.
c. Allowing himself to be executed is morally wrong.
d. If Socrates dies, his friends would miss him and they would be subject to public criticism.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 39-40

2. Socrates responds to Crito, saying that he cannot leave because the "laws of Athens" tell him that

a. he cannot enjoy the privileges of a society without also subjecting himself to its justice.
b. if a city is unjust, one must stay and protest until justice is done.
c. the city is more important than the individuals involved and so its judgments are always right.
d. he deserves his penalty.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 43-44

3. According to Socrates, the "laws of Athens" conclude that justice

a. is socially constructed.
b. is more important than friends, family, or one's own life.
c. has been corrupted by the people in power and therefore Socrates is under no obligation to obey.
d. only matters if it benefits the community as a whole.

Answer: b
Page Reference: 46

Essay Questions

1. Given his arguments in the Crito, what would Socrates say regarding civil disobedience? Should one tolerate or fight against the penalties of civil disobedience in order for justice to be done?

Phaedo

1. In the dialogue concerning two sticks of unequal length, Socrates' point is that our recognition of inequality

a. demonstrates that we have an understanding of equality and inequality prior to seeing particular equal or unequal objects.
b. shows that the careful observation of sticks of different length reveals the nature of equality and inequality.
c. shows that equality and inequality are relative terms, applicable only to particular objects and situations.
d. is too abstract to be understood by reason alone.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 48-49

2. According to Socrates, the soul

a. is an integral part of the body.
b. is part of a universal soul.
c. is separate from the body and possessed knowledge before becoming attached to the body.
d. recollects knowledge only by reflecting on abstract concepts.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 50

3. When Crito asks Socrates how he would like to be buried, Socrates replies "As you please, only you must catch me first," indicating that

a. he is still considering escaping.
b. his body will decompose too quickly to be buried properly.
c. when he is dead his soul will leave his body.
d. even after he dies his teachings will live on.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 56

Essay Questions

1. What distinction does Socrates make between the soul and body? How do we come to know these separate entities? How do the two interact?

Plato, *Republic*

1. At the beginning of the Republic, Socrates states that in examining the nature of communities he hopes to
    a. found a utopian society.
    b. show how individuals are unimportant.
    c. illustrate what justice is.
    d. compare the relation of individuals to the group as a whole.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 70

2. Which of the following is not a characteristic of Socrates' theoretical society?
    a. The community is formed because each person has needs which they cannot fulfill for themselves.
    b. There is no need for war.
    c. Trade develops as the population increases.
    d. The community is governed and protected by guardians.

Answer: b
Page Reference: 74-75

3. The most important quality that a guardian possesses is
    a. gentleness to the community and viciousness to its enemies.
    b. a dispassionate, meek temperament.
    c. relying on instinct, not knowledge.
    d. a love for the spirit of inclusion and democracy.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 76-77

4. The purpose for the guardian's lifestyle standards is to
    a. make the common people work to achieve similar privileges.
    b. keep them from taking the law too seriously.
    c. teach the guardians to govern the people severely.
    d. keep them from being corrupted by the desire for money and power.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 81

5. According to Socrates, justice is
    a. minding your own business.
    b. whatever the guardians say it is.
    c. treating all people in the community as equals.
    d. making sure that everyone gets an equal share.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 88

6. Socrates claims that a person is wise, courageous and just in the same way that _____ is/are wise, courageous, and just.

a. the guardians
b. the ruler
c. the city
d. one's family

Answer: c
Page Reference: 94

7. Socrates states that injustice results when

a. the guardians do not allow the common people a say in the government.
b. one part of the soul does not fulfill its proper function.
c. people are forced to suppress their instincts.
d. individuals are inconvenienced or harmed for the sake of the community.

Answer: b
Page Reference: 97

8. Socrates argues that women may act as guardians because

a. their maternal instincts make them more qualified than men to protect the community.
b. women have a duty to serve.
c. the natural gifts needed to rule are distributed to men and women.
d. although their minds are totally different, education can overcome those differences.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 102-103

9. According to the description of the society, children would be

a. cared for only by wet nurses.
b. cared for only by their blood parents.
c. shared by male members of the community.
d. eliminated from society.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 98

10. Socrates' ideal community guardians would have a philosophic nature so to

a. be ruthless to all enemies.
b. treat all peoples with humanity.
c. distinguish fellow citizens from enemy, non-citizens.
d. not fight because they are pacifists.

Answer: c
Page References: 76-77

11. Guardians in the fullest sense will combine
    a. quickness of mind and a steady character.
    b. ready understanding and good memory.
    c. sober constancy and steadiness.
    d. ruthlessness and passion

Answer: a
Page Reference: 76-77

12. In the Myth of the Cave, the prisoners in chains represent
    a. the Spartans.
    b. those who violate the rules of the guardians.
    c. those who are natural-born slaves.
    d. all of us before we recollect the Forms

Answer: d
Page Reference: 116-118

13. A society ought to be governed by philosophers because only philosophers
    a. know how to trick the common people into following the laws of the community.
    b. have sufficiently examined the various political structures of Greece.
    c. do not value political power.
    d. have no passions or appetites.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 124

14. According to Glaucon, the life of the just person (the person who 'would be, not seem the best') is
    a. praised and honored by all people.
    b. rewarded by the gods and favored in heaven.
    c. full of contentment and inner peace.
    d. none of the above.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 68

15. People agree to live in a just society, says Glaucon, because
    a. all people value justice as part of the eternal, unchanging Form of the Good.
    b. they think the just life is the best kind of life.
    c. they fear injustice towards themselves.
    d. they do not want anyone to get away with unjust crimes.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 65, 68

Essay Questions

1. On page 79, the "bold flight of invention" is often translated as "the noble lie." What is this noble lie, and what is its purpose? Why does Plato see this indoctrination necessary for his society? Do you think that the noble lie would work, or do you see problems arising from Plato's intended solution?

2. On pages 95-96, Socrates sets forth a universal requirement for justice. What is his universal requirement? How would this kind of justice work in the Republic, a society which is highly regulated and stratified?

3. Socrates changes from his discussion on the state to a discussion of the individual on p. 96. How do his divisions of society relate to his divisions of the soul? What is similar concerning the divisions of the classes and the soul? What is different? How do both the soul and the society reflect justice, as defined on pp. 95-96?

4. Women are given the opportunity to be guardians alongside of men in Plato's community. Consider the role of women as a whole in his discussion of the society as well as the passage on pages 99-104. Is Plato is advocating a kind of early feminism or is he reinforcing the role of women of his time?

5. Glaucon tells a story about the ring of Gyges, which has the power to turn the wearer invisible. Glaucon claims that ANYONE who wore this ring, just or unjust, would eventually become unjust and evil. What is it, precisely, that causes the wearer to become unjust? In other words, why does Gyges feel free to commit crimes with the ring that he never would have committed without them?

6. In The Lord of the Rings, JRR Tolkien borrows the idea of a ring that makes the bearer invisible from Glaucon's story of the ring of Gyges. In Tolkien's story, the ring has both the power to turn the wearer invisible and the power to corrupt anyone who wears it, even someone who is just. In Glaucon's original story, where does the corruption come from? Is the just person turned unjust by some evil power in the ring, or does the evil come from somewhere else? What is it about the ring, according to Glaucon, what brings about a change in the just person?

Aristotle

Biography

ARISTOTLE (384-322 B.C.)

Aristotle was born in Stagira, on the border of Macedonia. His mother, Phaestis, was from a family of doctors, and his father, Nicomachus, was the court physician to the king of Macedonia. At seventeen, Aristotle was sent to Athens. There he studied in Plato's Academy for two decades, but, as he later wrote, he loved the truth more than he loved Plato, and so he had no mind to remain a mere disciple. In 347 B.C., after Plato's death, he left Athens and spent the next four years conducting zoological investigations on the islands of Assos and Lesbos.

About 343 B.C., he was called to Macedonia by King Philip to tutor the king's son-the future Alexander the Great. Upon Alexander's ascension to the throne seven years later, Aristotle returned to Athens to set up the Lyceum, a rival to the Academy. Aristotle did much of his teaching walking up and down the colonnades with advanced students. As a result, his school and philosophy came to be called by the Greek word for walking around: *peripatetikos,* from which we get our word "peripatetic." Tradition has it that as Alexander the Great moved east, conquering Persia and moving into India, he would send back biological specimens for Aristotle's school. Although most scholars doubt this popular story, it is nevertheless clear that under Alexander's patronage, the Lyceum flourished.

However, the connection to Alexander proved a liability in the end. On Alexander's death in 323 B.C., Athenians went on a rampage against any and all associated with him. Indicted on charges of impiety, Aristotle fled Athens, "lest," as he put it, "the Athenians sin twice against philosophy" (referring, of course, to the unjust trial and death of Socrates). Aristotle died a year later. A popular but again highly questionable story says he drowned investigating marine life.

There is no doubt that after Plato, Aristotle is the most influential philosopher of all time. In the early Middle Ages, his thought was preserved and commented upon by the great Arab philosophers. He dominated later medieval philosophy to such an extent that St. Thomas Aquinas referred to him simply as *philosophus,* the "philosopher." Logic, as taught until about the time of World War II, was essentially Aristotle's logic. His *Poetics* is still a classic of literary criticism, and his dicta on tragedy are widely accepted even today. Criticism of Aristotle's metaphysical and epistemological views has spread ever since Bacon and Descartes inaugurated modern philosophy; but for all that, the problems Aristotle saw, the distinctions he introduced, and the terms he defined are still central in many, if not most, philosophical discussions. His influence and prestige, like Plato's, are international and beyond all schools.

Aristotle found Plato's theory of Forms unacceptable. Like Plato, he wanted to discover universals, but he did not believe they existed apart from particulars. The form of a chair, for instance, can be thought of apart from the matter *out of which* the chair is made, but the form does not subsist as a separate invisible entity. The universal of "chairness" exists only in particular chairs-there is no otherworldly "Form of Chairness." Accordingly, Aristotle began his philosophy not with reflection on or dialogue about eternal Forms but with observations of particular objects.

In observing the world, Aristotle saw four "causes" responsible for making an object what it is: the material, formal, efficient, and final. In the case of a chair, for example, the chair's material cause is its wood and cloth, its formal cause is the structure or form given in its plan or blueprint, its efficient cause is the worker who made it, and its final cause is sitting. The material cause, then, is that out of which a thing is made, the formal cause is that into which a thing is made, the efficient cause is that *by which* a thing is made, and the final cause is that *for which* a thing is made. It is the last of these, the final cause, that Aristotle held to be most important, for it determined the other three. The "goal" or "end" (*telos* in Greek), the final cause, of any given substance is the key to its understanding. This means that all nature is to be understood in terms of final causes or purposes. This is known as a "teleological" explanation of reality.

As Aristotle applied these insights to human beings, he asked what the telos of a person could be. By observing what is unique to persons and what they, in fact, do seek, Aristotle came to the conclusion that the highest good or end for humans is *eudaimonia*. While this word is generally translated as "happiness," one must be careful to acknowledge that Aristotle's understanding of "happiness" is rather different from ours. *Eudaimonia* happiness is not a feeling of euphoria—in fact, it is not a feeling at all. It is rather "activity in accordance with virtue." Much of the material from the *Nicomachean Ethics* presented here is devoted both to clarifying the word and to discovering how this kind of "happiness" is to be achieved.

Aristotle's extant works lack the literary grace of Plato's. Like Plato, Aristotle is said to have written popular dialogues-the "exoteric" writings intended for those who were not students at the Lyceum-but they have not survived. What we have instead are the difficult "esoteric" works: lecture notes for classes at school. According to some scholars, these are not even Aristotle's notes, but the notes of students collected by editors. In any case, the writings as we have them contain much overlapping, repetition, and apparent contradiction.

Book II of the *Physics*, with which we begin, deals with some of the main questions of physical science. After defining the term “nature,” Aristotle discusses change and necessity. And making a distinction between physics and mathematics, he discusses the four causes. Throughout this text, Aristotle displays
his teleological understanding of nature—that is, that natural processes operate for an end or purpose.

The *Metaphysics* probably consists of several independent treatises. Book I (*Alpha*) of this collection develops Aristotle's four causes and reviews the history of philosophy to his time. Book XII (*Lambda*) employs many of the concepts previously introduced, such as substance, actuality, and potency, and then moves to Aristotle's theology of the Unmoved Mover. The work concludes with Aristotle's rejection of Platonic Forms as separate, mathematical entities. Apparently, Aristotle was responding to Plato's successors, who emphasized the mathematical nature of the Forms.

The first part of the selection presented from Aristotle's *On the Soul (De Anima)* gives a definition of the soul and distinguishes its faculties. The second part discusses the passive and the active mind. As this selection makes clear, Aristotle rejected Plato's view of a soul separate from the body. The selections from *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *On the Soul* are all translated by Joe Sachs.

The *Nicomachean Ethics,* is still considered one of the greatest works in ethics. Named for Aristotle's son, Nicomachus, it discusses the nature of the good and of moral and intellectual virtues, as well as investigating specific virtues. The lengthy selection presented here (about one-half of the complete work) reflects this vast range of topics and includes discussions of the subject matter and nature of ethics; of the good for an individual; of moral virtue; of the mean; of the conditions of responsibility for an action; of pride, vanity, humility, and the great-souled man (Aristotle's ideal); of the superiority of loving over being loved; and finally, of human happiness. The translation is Martin Ostwald's.

The marginal page numbers, with their "a" and "b," are those of all scholarly editions—Greek, English, German, French, and others.

* * *

Timothy A. Robinson, *Aristotle in Outline* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995) provides an excellent short introduction for the beginning student. W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, VI: Aristotle: An Encounter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and the classic W.D. Ross, *Aristotle* (1923; reprinted in New York: Meridian Books, 1959) are more advanced studies. John Herman Randall, Jr., *Aristotle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); Marjorie Grene, *A Portrait of Aristotle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); J.L. Ackrill, *Aristotle the Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Kenneth McLeisch, *Aristotle* (London: Routledge, 1999);

Aristotle, *Physics*

1. According to Aristotle, the primary difference between physics (natural science) and mathematics is
    a. physics deals with objects as concepts, not as particulars.
    b. physics deals with whether the earth is a sphere; mathematics does not.
    c. mathematics separates the attributes of a natural object from the object; physics does not.
    d. mathematics is not concerned with the attributes of natural objects; physics is.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 129-131

2. If Aristotle were watching a game of golf, what would he identify as the cause of a hole-in-one?
    a. the lie (where the ball starts)
    b. the putter striking the ball
    c. the player's desire to get a birdie
    d. All the above are causes.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 154, 132-133, 140

3. If a bee suddenly stung Aristotle, Aristotle would say that
    a. the bee stung him by chance.
    b. by careful study and consideration he could determine the multiple factors that caused the bee to sting him at that very moment.
    c. he was the cause of the bee's stinging him.
    d. this particular case of bee stinging has no relation to bee stinging in general.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 136

Essay Questions

1. According to Aristotle, what does it take to fully understand the "why" or the "cause" of a thing?

2. Consider Aristotle's definitions of chance and spontaneity. How are the two related? Does his explanation imply that all events are totally determined?

Metaphysics

1. In order to become wise, one must
    a. live a life full of many growing experiences.
    b. appreciate art and be an accomplished artist.
    c. study extensively, especially science and philosophy.
    d. know causes and principles.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 141

2. Given what Aristotle says about wisdom, art and experience, what might he say about the Internet?
    a. "The Internet has lots of information and so is a source of wisdom."
    b. "The Internet has lots of information and is a good source of factual data."
    c. "The Internet provides you with experiences and so is a source of wisdom."
    d. "The final cause of the Internet is to waste your time."

Answer: b
Page Reference: 163-64

3. Aristotle's primary criticism of the first philosophers is that
    a. they argue minor points instead of synthesizing their beliefs.
    b. they fail to take all of the four causes into account.
    c. they do not acknowledge the unmoved mover.
    d. they agreed with Plato in this theory of the Forms.

Answer: b
Page Reference: 144-46

4. Which of the following is not one of Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's theory of Forms?
    a. There is no proof for the existence of Forms.
    b. There would have to be Forms of negations.
    c. The theory of Forms does not help our knowledge of particulars.
    d. Because Forms are numbers they must be the causes of all things.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 126, 148-150

5. According to Aristotle, there must be a first mover which
    a. created the world out of non-being.
    b. intervenes on behalf of humans.
    c. exists necessarily.
    d. is pure potentiality.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 154

Essay Questions

1. What are the four causes? To what do they apply? Aristotle gives the four causes as much of a place in his philosophy as Plato gave the Forms in his. How does this illustrate the difference between the two and Aristotle's focus of interest?

2. What are Aristotle's primary criticisms of Plato? How do Aristotle's criticisms show faults with the theory of the Forms. Do you think his arguments are successful?

3. Why is an unmoved Mover necessary to Aristotle's system? What are the unmoved Mover's characteristics? How does Aristotle establish these many specific characteristics from the Mover's existence?

On the Soul

1. Of any living thing we can properly say
    a. its soul is the function of its body.
    b. if it is a human, then it has a soul
    c. the soul can exist apart from the body only in the heavens
    d. the soul is a potential brought to fulfillment by a body

Answer: a
Page Reference: 157-158

2. Thinking is related to perceiving in that thinking
    a. increases when we are strongly stimulated just as our ability to perceive increases after our sense organs are strongly stimulated.
    b. is about universals while perceiving is about particulars.
    c. is done in the brain while perceiving is done in the sense organs.
    d. is about what is thinkable as perceiving is about what is sensible.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 159-161

Essay Questions

1. Describe the three kinds of souls and explain which kind of living thing has which one(s).

Nichomachean Ethics

1. What does Aristotle conclude is goodness?
    a. something which is wanted for its own sake
    b. that which is best for the individual
    c. that which brings the most pleasure
    d. that which partakes in goodness

Answer: a
Page Reference: 170

2. This year, the Happiest Aristotelean Award goes to
    a. Bob the bartender, who gets liquored up all day and parties all night.
    b. Sam the soldier, who has 10 purple hearts and is admired by his country.
    c. Bill the insurance broker, who works hard to provide for his clients.
    d. Roberta the venture capitalist, who made a fortune in Internet stocks.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 165-166, 169-170

3. Aristotle rejects Plato's view of the good because
    a. Plato's view is too absolutist.
    b. people don't actually want the good as Plato thought.
    c. the good that Plato spoke of is unattainable for humans.
    d. Plato saw good not as an aim for humans, but simply as an abstraction.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 189

4. After stating that happiness needs to be attainable, Aristotle goes on to say that
    a. no one can attain it in this life.
    b. happiness requires good parents, good children, and good looks.
    c. in his system, happiness is equally attainable for everyone.
    d. happiness results from right attitudes, and not from actions.

Answer: b
Page Reference: s 221-224

5. Happiness requires activity which is an expression of complete virtue _____.
    a. and external goods
    b. and honor
    c. and pleasure
    d. alone

Answer: a
Page Reference: 225

6. Suppose Aristotle met Mother Teresa. What would he most likely say of her moral virtue?

a. Her Catholic upbringing taught her to love the poor.
b. She has a kind nature and so naturally helps the poor.
c. A lifetime of helping the poor has made it natural for her to help the poor.
d. Her virtue is particular and has no bearing on universal virtue.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 178, 182

7. Of the three kinds of things found in the soul (emotions, capacities, and characteristics), Aristotle says that virtue has to do with

a. characteristics, because virtue cannot be merely an emotion or a capacity for an emotion.
b. capacity, because virtue cannot be emotionally based and since it has to do with choice it cannot be merely a characteristic of a person.
c. capacity, because virtue deals with the capacity to do either good or evil.
d. emotion, because it is the only one of the three that is part of the soul.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 191-192

8. Which of the following does Aristotle *not* say in regards to the "Golden Mean"?

a. The "Golden Mean" is relatively easy to find.
b. Some actions and emotions cannot be understood by means of the "Golden Mean."
c. The "Golden Mean" is a way to determine if an action is virtuous.
d. The "Golden Mean" leads to virtue.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 182-183

9. Concerning moral weakness and self-indulgence, Aristotle claims that

a. both are equally bad because they lead a person to vice.
b. self-indulgence is worse because the self-indulgent person has an evil intent.
c. moral weakness is worse because the person has no strength of will.
d. both spring from a lack of knowing the good.

Answer: b
Page Reference: 214-215

10. Aristotle concludes happiness is

a. an exciting and thrilling feeling.
b. that which draws us to higher goods.
c. a pleasant and peaceful feeling.
d. a way of life.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 219

Essay Questions

1. Aristotle concedes that certain externals are needed for happiness. How does this fit with his assertion that happiness must be attainable? Is he contradicting himself or is he being practical in his assertion?

2. Aristotle's ethics are often referred to as "virtue ethics." How do his ethics differ from those of deontology or utilitarianism in its goals?

3. According to Aristotle, moral weakness is less reprehensible than self-indulgence. What is his basis for saying so? Consider the case of a pre-meditated murder and a man who habitually abuses his wife. Which one is worse in Aristotle's eyes?

4. What is and is not happiness according to Aristotle? How does this contrast with the present-day attitude towards happiness?

5. What is the final cause of human beings? How do Aristotle's ethics reflect his metaphysics?

6. According to Aristotle, which is better: a moral purpose, a moral action, both, or neither?

Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy

Introduction

Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., three of his generals, Ptolemy, Seleucus, and Antigonus, carved up the empire he had created. For the next three centuries the descendants of these three men ruled the eastern Mediterranean world. By 30 B.C., with the Roman Emperor Octavian's defeat of Anthony and Cleopatra and the annexation of Egypt, the period of Greek rule was over. Real power in the area had shifted westward to emerging Rome.

This shift from Greek to Roman authority did not happen without social and political turmoil, and the philosophies that developed during this period reflect that turmoil. The emphasis now was not on complete systems of thought, such as those proposed by Plato and Aristotle. In their place were theories focusing on the practical questions of the good life for individuals. In a world that seemed more and more chaotic and uncontrollable, philosophers began to seek personal salvation more than comprehensive theories. Even the Platonic Academy and the Aristotelian Lyceum, which continued for centuries, moved from the constructive doctrines of their founders to more narrowly defined critical issues.

The roots of the Epicurean school can be traced back to an early Socratic school, the Cyrenaics. The Cyrenaic school was founded by one of Socrates' associates and admirers, Aristippus of Cyrene, from Libya, in northern Africa. The Cyrenaics disparaged speculative philosophy and extolled the pleasure of the moment. But, following Aristippus, they maintained that the purest pleasure derives from self-mastery and the philosophic life. Only philosophy can protect human beings from passion, which inevitably brings suffering. While despising popular opinion, the Cyrenaics did believe that custom, law, and altruism contributed to long-range pleasure. The Cyrenaic philosophy, with its understanding of the good life as enjoyment of stable pleasures, led to the development of the Epicurean school as expressed by Epicurus.

The history of the Stoic school begins with the thought of Socrates' follower Antisthenes. Antisthenes, a rhetorician with an Athenian father and a Phrygian, non-Greek mother, had been a teacher before he met Socrates, who made a profound impression on him. It seems to have been Socrates' character—his self-control and self-sufficiency, his indifference to winter cold, his serenely ironic superiority in every experience, and the opinions of others (see the *Apology*)—that struck Antisthenes with the force of revelation. What he learned from Socrates was neither a metaphysic nor even a philosophic method but, as he put it, "to live with myself." When he disposed of his possessions, keeping only a ragged old coat, Socrates is said to have taunted him: "I see your vanity through the holes of your coat." Antisthenes founded a school whose members acquired the nickname of "Cynics" <*kynikos*>, Greek for "doglike." The Cynics slept on the ground, neglected their clothes, let their beards grow to unusual lengths, and despised the conventions of society, insisting that virtue and happiness

consist of self-control and independence. They believed that human dignity was independent of human laws and customs.

Of Antisthenes' Cynic disciples, none was more famous than Diogenes, who went about carrying a lantern in daylight and, when asked why, would reply, "I am looking for an honest man." He made his home in a tub. His eccentric behavior attracted the attention of even Alexander the Great, who, on visiting him, asked whether there was anything at all that he could do to please him. Diogenes replied: "Yes, get out of my sunlight."

Emphasizing self-control and independence, and locating human dignity outside law and convention, the Cynicism of Antisthenes and Diogenes flowed like a tributary into Stoicism. Stoicism, in turn, became the dominant philosophy of the Roman Empire.

A third Hellenistic school of philosophy, Skepticism, also had its roots in Socrates' teachings: specifically, in Socrates' repeated claim that he did not know anything. Based on the work of Pyrrho of Elis (ca. 360–270 B.C.), this movement stressed the contradictory nature of knowledge and advocated suspending judgment and achieving an attitude of detachment.

The last great movement of ancient philosophy was Neoplatonism. The leader of this return to Platonic concepts, Plotinus (A.D. 204–270), did not lack enthusiasm, but he was, nevertheless, more remote from classical Greek attitudes than were the Hellenistic philosophers. He extolled the spirit to the point of saying he was ashamed to have a body; his fervor was entirely mystical, and he longed, to cite his famous words, to attain "the flight of the Alone to the Alone." Thus he perfected the less classical tendencies of Plato's thought, merging those tendencies with Neopythagoreanism and with Oriental notions such as the emanations from the One.

In A.D. 529, Plato's Academy was closed by Emperor Justinian, bringing to an end a millennium of Greek and Roman philosophy.

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For clear, concise introductions to the Hellenistic and Roman philosophers, see Frederick Copleston, "Post-Aristotelian Philosophy," in his *A History of Philosophy: Volume I, Greece & Rome, Part II* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1962), and D.W. Hamlyn, "Greek Philosophy after Aristotle," in D.J. O'Connor, ed., *A Critical History of Western Philosophy* (New York: The Free Press, 1964). Eduard Zeller, *The Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics,* translated by Oswald J. Reichel (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962); Émile Bréhier, *The Hellenistic and Roman Age,* translated by Wade Baskin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (New York: Scribners, 1974); R.W. *Sharples, Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics* (Oxford: Routledge, 1996); John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Mark Morford, *Roman Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2002), are all solid histories of the period. A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers,* two vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1987) and Keimpe Algra, et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) provide source material and discussions, while Jacques Brunschwig, *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Terence Irwin, ed., *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Hamden, CT: Garland Publishing, 1995) give technical expositions of a number of important issues. For an interesting comparative approach to the Hellenistic thinkers, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Epicurus
Biography

EPICURUS (341-270 B.C.)

Like Pythagoras, Epicurus was born on the Greek island of Samos. At eighteen he went to Athens for a year, then joined his father in Colophon, the city where Xenophanes had been born. He studied the writings of Democritus and eventually set up his own school on the island of Lesbos. From there he moved to the Hellespont and, finally, to Athens in 307 B.C. As he moved from place to place, many of his students followed him. In Athens he established a community known as the "Garden," where he spent the rest of his life teaching and writing.

Epicurus's community welcomed people of all classes and of both sexes. The school required no fee from students, accepting what each individual was able and willing to pay. Epicurus himself was almost worshiped by his disciples, and members of his group had to swear an oath: "I will be faithful to Epicurus in accordance with whom I have made it my choice to live."* Among the later followers of Epicurus's thought, the Roman poet Lucretius (98–55 B.C.) considered him to be a god. Yet Epicurus was not overbearing or authoritarian. According to all accounts, he was kind and generous, treating his followers as friends, not subordinates. While dying in agony from a urinary obstruction, Epicurus wrote a letter that illustrates his gracious spirit. The extant portion includes these words to his friend Idomeneus: "I have a bulwark against all this pain from the joy in my soul at the memory of our conversations together."**

Epicurus wrote over three hundred volumes, but all that has survived are some fragments, three complete letters, and a short treatise summarizing his views. These surviving works provide an understanding of Epicurus's physics and ethics and give some sense of his psychology and theory of knowledge. Epicurus's first letter, *To Herodotus,* explains his atomistic theory. Like Democritus, Epicurus asserts that reality is composed of atoms and the void. But unlike Democritus, whose atomism is deterministic, Epicurus broaches the notion that atoms sometimes inexplicably "swerve." As atoms "fell downward" through the void, some of them swerved from their paths and collided with other atoms, setting off a chain reaction that eventually led to the world as we know it. Epicurus goes on to explore the implications of this theory for perception and knowledge.

The second letter, *To Pythocles*, on astronomy and meteorology, is of questionable origin and adds little to our understanding of Epicurus's thought. But the third letter, *To Menoeceus,* together with the short work *Principle Doctrines* explains his central ethical theory. Epicurus declares that pleasure is the highest good, though some pleasures are unnatural and unnecessary. In contrast to the modern understanding of the word "epicurean," Epicurus opposed exotic meals and profuse consumption. Such indulgences

never bring permanent pleasure and frequently lead to its opposite: pain. Instead Epicurus advocates enjoying only the "natural" pleasures—those most likely to lead to contentment and repose. Epicurus's ethical works are reprinted here, complete, in the Russel M. Geer translations.

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The classic secondary work on Epicurus is Cyril Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928). Norman Wentworth De Witt, *Epicurus and His Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), provides an interesting interpretation—one which John M. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), contests. A.E. Taylor, *Epicurus* (1911; reprinted New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969); G.K. Stradach, *The Philosophy of Epicurus* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963); and Diskin Clay, *Lucretius and Epicurus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), give helpful overviews. A.J. Festugière, *Epicurus and His Gods*, translated by C.W. Chilton (1955; reprinted London: Russell, 1969); James H. Nichols, Jr., *Epicurean Political Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976); and Tim O'Keefe, *Epicurus on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), deal with specific topics.

Epicurus, *Letter to Menoceus*

1. According to Epicurus, we can remove the fear of death by
    a. recognizing there are no gods to fear.
    b. removing the desire for immortality.
    c. living in such a way that we achieve immortality.
    d. not thinking about it.

Answer: b
Page Reference: 233

2. Because pleasure is the greatest good, one ought to
    a. choose every pleasure possible.
    b. satisfy all natural desires.
    c. satisfy all necessary natural desires.
    d. avoid all pain.

Answer: c
Page Reference: 234

Essay Questions

1. We often speak of a lavish banquet as an "Epicurean delight." What would Epicurus say in response to this and why?

Principal Doctrines

1. The purpose of the natural sciences is to
    a. remove our fear of nature.
    b. gain knowledge for its own sake.
    c. experience the inherent pleasure of learning.
    d. gain knowledge which can be used to make money.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 236

2. With regards to politics, Epicurus would most likely say
    a. "Live unseen."
    b. "If I don't do it, who will?"
    c. "Question authority."
    d. "Power to the people."

Answer: a
Page Reference: 236-238

3. In contrast to Plato's view of justice, Epicurus holds that
    a. justice does not lead to pleasure.
    b. justice is the will of the stronger.
    c. justice is oppressive and hence does not give pleasure.
    d. the abstract concept of justice is meaningless.

Answer: d
Page Reference: 238

4. Epicurus would be against cheating because
    a. there is more pleasure in doing the good.
    b. the gods oppose it.
    c. one would be afraid of getting caught.
    d. it is wrong.

Answer: a
Page Reference: 236

Essay Questions

1. Describe Epicurus' view on sensation.

Epictetus

Biography

EPICTETUS (ca. 50-ca. 130 A.D.)

Epictetus was born a slave in Hierapolis, a small town in Phrygia, Asia Minor (in present-day Turkey). His master was Epaphroditus, a member of Emperor Nero's personal staff in Rome. As was often done at that time, Epaphroditus saw to it that Epictetus had a good education, sending him to study with the Roman Stoic, Rufus. Epictetus gained his freedom sometime after the death of the emperor in A.D. 68 and began to teach philosophy in Rome. In A.D. 89 or 93 Emperor Domitian expelled all philosophers from Rome. Domitian seems to have been especially angry with the Stoics for teaching that sovereignty comes from God and is for the benefit of the people. (Epictetus's reported claim that he had the same regard for the emperor as for his water-pot could not have helped.) Epictetus moved to Nicropolis in Epirus (northwestern Greece), where he established a thriving Stoic school and lived a simple life with few material goods. As an old man, he married so that he could adopt a child who otherwise would have been "exposed," that is, left to die. Those whom he taught described him as a humble, charitable man of great moral and religious devotion.

Epictetus never wrote anything, but one of his admiring students, Arrian, composed eight *Discourses* based on Epictetus's lectures, along with a summary of the great man's thought, the *Encheiridion* (or *Manual*). The *Encheiridion,* given here complete in the W.A. Oldfather translation, builds on the early Stoa's concept of *Logos*. Since the *Logos* or natural law permeates everything, it provides us with moral intuition, so all persons have the capacity for virtue. But in order to live the moral life, one must apply these intuitions to specific cases. Education is necessary if we are to learn how to properly connect moral insights with life. We must begin by recognizing the fact that we cannot change events that happen to us, but we can change our attitude toward those events. To accomplish this and achieve the good life, we must go through three stages. First, we must order our desires and overcome our fears. Next, we must perform our duties-in whatever role fate has given us. Finally, we must think clearly and judge accurately. Only then will we gain inner tranquility.

Despite Emperor Domitian's condemnation, Stoicism had a special appeal to the Roman mind. The Romans were not much interested in the speculative and theoretical content of Zeno's early Stoa. Instead, in the austere moral emphasis of Epictetus, with his concomitant stress on self-control and superiority to pain, the Romans found an ideal for the wise man, whereas the Stoic description of natural law provided a basis for Roman law. One might say that the pillars of republican Rome tended to be Stoical, even if some Romans had never heard of Stoicism.