

PLATONISM

Plato (427-347 B.C.) is the first of the central figures of ancient philosophy and he is the earliest author whose work we can read in considerable quantities. He has written about nearly all major philosophical issues and is probably most famous for his theory of universals and for his political teachings.

In Athens, he established a school called the Academy at the beginning of the fourth century B.C. Platonism was originally expressed in the dialogues of Plato, in which the figure of Socrates is used to expound certain doctrines, that may or may not be similar to the thought of the historical Socrates, Plato's master. Plato delivered his lectures at the Academy. The school continued there long after Plato's death.

Platonism philosophy has an intense concern for the quality of human life—always ethical, often religious, and sometimes political, based on a belief in unchanging and eternal realities, which Plato called forms, independent of the changing things of the world perceived by the senses. Platonism sees these realities both as the causes of the existence of everything in the universe and as giving value and meaning to its contents in general and the life of its inhabitants in particular.

Plato claimed that knowledge gained through the senses is no more than opinion and that, in order to have real knowledge, we must gain it through philosophical reasoning. This is also referred to as Dualism, where there is a world of ideal forms separate from the world of perception. Plato wrote extensively and most of his writings survived. His works are in the form of dialogues, where several characters argue a topic by asking questions of each other. This form allows Plato to raise various points of view and let the reader decide which is valid. Everyone who has ever lived has asked some version of the same question, at some point in life: Why are we here? What is the point of all this? What is 'reality,' and what am I supposed to do with (or about) it? Plato, attempted to answer some of these philosophical questions, most notably about the nature of reality.

One of Socrates' (and Plato's) chief ideas was that of Theory of Forms, which explains that the world is made up of reflections of more perfect and ideal forms. The material world, the one we can see, touch, hear and smell, is really just half-seen images of the reality of the forms. Relying on your physical senses alone - trusting what you see, for instance, is, to Socrates, making yourself effectively blind. The world we see is only a reflection of the forms the world represents (and not even that accurately). A form, whether it's a circle, or a table, or a tree or a dog, is, for Socrates, the answer to the question, what is that? Only understanding forms can lead to true knowledge. Plato uses a parable, a short informative story, to illustrate 'forms' and the 'cave,' in his main work, *The Republic* (which first appeared around 380 BC).

Plato believed that the most important phenomena we encounter in this world can be explained by seeking the simplest elements out of which these are composed. Among these are human personhood, and the personal attribute of freedom, cognition, the presence of evil, and the very existence of a universe. The Platonism views the world as a unity in the sense that its constituents and the laws according to which it operates are really and intelligibly interrelated. Because the world is a unity, a systematic understanding of it is possible. Thus, particular doctrines in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and so on are ultimately relatable within the system.

Plato died in 347 B.C.E. In the middle ages he was eclipsed by Aristotle. His works were saved for posterity by Islamic scholars and reintroduced into the west in the Renaissance. Since then he has been a strong influence on philosophy, as well as natural and social science.

PLATO'S DIALOGUES

The exact order of the dialogues is not known. The following is a consensus ordering based on internal evidence:

Early Dialogues

In these dialogues, Socrates is the central character, and is believed to be expressing his own views. These are the only remaining record of Socrates' teachings; hence these are known as the Socratic dialogues.

Apology (the Death of Socrates)
Crito
Charmides or Temperance
Laches or Courage
Lysis or Friendship
Euthyphro
Ion

Middle Dialogues

In these dialogues, Plato begins expressing his own views, but he appears in the guise of Socrates. The Symposium and Republic (which includes Allegory of Cave) are the most important works in this period.

Gorgias
Protagoras
Meno
Euthydemus
Cratylus
Phaedo
Phaedrus
Symposium
The Republic
Theaetetus
Parmenides

Late Dialogues

The later dialogues are deeper developments of the philosophy expressed in the earlier ones; these are the most difficult of Plato's works and many scholars have written extensively on these dialogues.

Sophist
Statesman
Philebus
Timaeus
Critias
Laws
The Seventh Letter

ARISTOTELIANISM

Aristotle (384-322B.C.) was a student of Plato and one of the most influential philosophers to date. Aristotle studied at Plato's school and remained there until Plato's death. In 335 B.C. he founded a school in Athens, the Lyceum, which contributed to spread his teachings. Aristotle's works have exercised tremendous influence not only upon the Western politics and tradition but also upon the Indian and the Arabic traditions as well as all major religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Aristotle served as a tutor to Alexander the Great, a fact about his past that hurt his standing with many people once Alexander began to conquer the majority of the known world. Like his mentor Plato, most of Aristotle's work was lost initially. Plato's writings were recovered later, but Aristotle's actual works were never recovered - instead we only have class notes from his students to give us an idea of what Aristotle's views and beliefs actually were.

Aristotle developed the earlier philosophical work of Socrates and Plato in a more practical manner, and was the first to create a comprehensive system of philosophy, encompassing Ethics, Metaphysics, Aesthetics, Logic, Epistemology, Politics and Science. He rejected the Rationalism and Idealism espoused by Platonism, and advocated the characteristic Aristotelian virtue of practical wisdom or prudence.

Aristotelian Logic was the dominant form of Logic explained in his six books on Logic, organized into a collection known as the "Organon" in the 1st Century B.C., which remain standard texts even today.

Aristotle's works on Ethics revolve around the idea that morality is a practical and not a theoretical field. If a person is to become virtuous, he must perform virtuous activities and not simply study what virtue is. He stressed that man is a rational animal, and that Virtue comes with the proper exercise of reason. He also promoted the idea of the "golden mean", the desirable middle ground, between two undesirable extremes, e.g. the virtue of courage is a mean between the two vices of cowardice and foolhardiness.

Aristotelian Metaphysics and Epistemology largely follow those of his teacher, Plato, although he began to diverge on some matters. Aristotle assumed that for knowledge to be true it must be unchangeable, as must the object of that knowledge. The universe therefore divides into two phenomena, Form (the abstract and unobservable, such as souls or knowledge) and Matter (the observable, things that can be sensed and quantified), and these two phenomena are different from, but indispensable to, each other. Consider a particular plant. That plant is a material substance. So it has both matter and form. The form is the arrangement, nature and state of the plant. Plato believed that Form and Matter are inseparable, and that matter and form do not exist apart from each other, but only together.

Aristotelian politics differed from Plato's who divided class into three group; Guardian, Auxiliary and Artisan and insisted that the state must be ruled by Guardian (philosopher). Aristotle opposed the idea of one class holding political power. He thought that there are six kinds of political constitutions; kingship, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity and democracy - which he viewed as an inferior system equated to "mob rule". Aristotle's theory of Politics nevertheless emphasizes the belief that humans are naturally political, and that the political life of a free citizen in a self-governing state or "polis" with a constitution which is a mixture of leadership, aristocracy and citizen participation. He believed that these constitutions could help to adopt their distribution of powers and interests in their state. Aristotelian ideals have underlain much modern liberal thinking about politics, the vote and citizenship.

Near the end of his life, Alexander and Aristotle became estranged over Alexander's relationship with Persia and Persians. He died in 322 BC at his mother's family estate in Chalcis, on Euboea. leaving a will in which he asked to be buried next to his wife

STOICISM

Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy which was founded by Zeno of Citium, in Athens around 300 B.C. Stoicism is a philosophy of personal ethics governed by its system of logic or *logos* and its views on the natural world and the idea that what happens is necessary. According to its teachings, as social beings, the path to *eudemonia* or happiness for humans is found in accepting the moment as it presents itself, by not allowing oneself to be controlled by the desire for pleasure or fear of pain, by using one's mind to understand the world and to do one's part in nature's plan, and by working together and treating others fairly and justly.

For Stoicism, the goal of human philosophizing is the achievement of a state of absolute tranquility. This is obtained through the progressive education to independence from one's needs. The stoic philosopher will not fear any bodily or social condition, having trained not to depend on bodily need or any specific passion, commodity, or friendship. This is not to say that the stoic philosophers will not seek pleasure, success, or long-standing relationships: simply that they will not live for them.

People following Stoicism learn to be less discouraged by setbacks and disappointments. They are more adaptable to change and are able to recognize and express their needs. They focus on getting around a hurdle rather than on the hurdle itself, can learn from mistakes and criticism and tend to see the larger perspective in a challenging situation. Stoicism teaches the ability to recover more quickly from emotional wounds such as failure or rejection or even loss of a loved one.

One of the more important Stoic philosophers is The Greek philosopher, Epictetus who was born a slave around 55 A.D. He was passionate about philosophy from a young age and taught philosophy after gaining his freedom. His philosophical thoughts were gathered by one of his students and published as Epictetus' Discourses and a more concise version became the Handbook of Epictetus. The handbook which consists of 53 short chapters - some only one or two paragraphs - is a guide to a happy life. Epictetus believed that apart from our mind and our thoughts, we possess nothing in life, not even our body.

No less true of us today than it was for the ancients, few people are content with life (let alone wholly content) and what contributes to any contentment that may be enjoyed is almost certainly short-lived and transient. The task for the Stoic teacher commences with the understanding that perhaps not everyone is *eudemon* for much, or even all, of the time; that there is a reason for this being the case and, most importantly, that there are solutions that can remedy this sorry state of affairs.

Epictetus metaphorically speaks of his school as being a hospital to which students would come seeking treatments for their ills. Each of us, in the course of our daily life, are beset by frustrations and setbacks of every conceivable type. Our cherished enterprises are hindered and thwarted, we have to deal with hostile and offensive people, and we have to cope with the difficulties and anxieties occasioned by the setbacks and illnesses visited upon our friends and relations. Sometimes we are ill ourselves, and even those who have the good fortune to enjoy sound health have to face the fact of their own mortality. In the midst of all this, only the rare few are blessed with lasting and rewarding relationships, and even these relationships, along with everything that constitutes a human life, are wholly transient.

We are like travelers at an inn, or guests at a stranger's table; whatever is offered we take with thankfulness, and sometimes, when the turn comes, we may refuse; in the former case we are a worthy guest of the deities, and in the latter we appear as a sharer in their power. Anyone who finds life intolerable is free to quit it, but we should not abandon our appointed role without sufficient reason. The Stoic sage will never find life intolerable and will complain of no one, neither deity nor human. Those who go wrong we should pardon and treat with compassion, since it is from ignorance that they err, being as it were, blind.

EPICUREANISM

Epicureanism is an ancient school of philosophy founded in Athens by Epicurus, who was born on the Greek island of Samos to Athenian parents who had gone there as military settlers. His father was a schoolteacher and both parents were of the same village called the Gargettos. According to his own report, Epicurus began his study of philosophy at the age of 14. One account has him turning to philosophy when his schoolmaster could not explain the concept of chaos in Hesiod, an early Greek philosophical poet.

At the age of 18, Epicurus went to Athens to perform the two years of military training required for Athenian citizenship. While there he may have heard Xenocrates, second in succession after Plato as head of his Academy, and Aristotle, who was then in Athens. For the next 10 years, it appears that Epicurus travelled and studied, and it is supposedly the period during which he developed his philosophical outlook and confirmed it in exchanges with the Platonists and Aristotelians.

In various places Epicurus met the disciples who were destined to follow him to Athens and to become of great significance as vehicles through whom the Epicurean school would achieve its mature development. Influence by the Cynics and the Aristotelian thoughts, he turned against the Platonism of his day and established his own school, known as "the Garden", in Athens. Epicurus and his followers were known for eating simple meals and discussing a wide range of philosophical subjects.

What Epicurus brought to Athens was more a way of life than a school or a community. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, Epicurus openly allowed women to join the school as a matter of policy and even one of Epicurus' slaves, named Mouse was admitted to the school. The school rejected determinism and advocated hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), but of a restrained kind: mental pleasure was regarded more highly than physical, and the ultimate pleasure was held to be freedom from anxiety and mental pain, especially that arising from needless fear of death and of the gods.

Among ancient philosophers' names, "Epicurus" is probably one of those that is most frequently cited in non-philosophical discourses in today's world, but it is not always used in the true meaning of Epicureanism. In fact, even though Epicurus taught that the life worth being lived is spent seeking pleasure; the question is: which forms of pleasure? In today's etymology, Epicureanism has often been misunderstood as a doctrine preaching the indulgence into the most vicious bodily pleasures. On the contrary, Epicurus himself was known for his temperate eating habits, and for his moderation.

Epicurus' exhortations were directed towards the cultivation of friendship as well as any activity which most elevates our spirits, such as music, literature, and art. Epicureanism was also characterized by metaphysical principles; among them, the theses that our world is one out of many possible worlds and that what happens does so by chance. The latter doctrine is developed also in the book; *De Rerum Natura* by the Roman poet and philosopher, Lucretius.

Lucretius was an early thinker in what grew to become the study of evolution. He believed nature experiments endlessly over time, and determined that the organisms that adapt best to their environment have the best chance of surviving. Living organisms survived because of their strength, speed, or intellect. While Epicurus left open the possibility for free will by arguing for the uncertainty of the paths of atoms, Lucretius viewed the soul or mind as emerging from arrangements of distinct particles.

On the day in his 72nd year that Epicurus died painfully of prostatitis. Epicurus' will left the house, garden, and some funds to trustees of the school and he made a provision to free all his slaves.

SKEPTICISM

As a philosophical school or movement, skepticism arose both in ancient Greece and India and was a major early rival of Buddhism and Jainism. Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360-c. 270 B.C.) is the earliest figure in ancient Greek skepticism on record. He seems to have written no text and to have held common opinion in no consideration, hence attributing no relevance to the most basic and instinctive habits. Probably influenced also by the Buddhist tradition of his time, Pyrrho viewed the suspension of judgment as a means to achieve that freedom of disturbance (peace) that alone can lead to happiness. His goal was to keep each human's life in a state of perpetual inquiry. Indeed, the mark of skepticism is the suspension of judgment.

Some of the earlier philosophers such as Xenophanes, a wandering poet and philosopher, doubted whether humans could distinguish true from false knowledge. He expressed some skeptical views, as did Democritus and a number of Sophists. Gorgias, for example, reputedly argued that nothing exists, that even if there were something we could not know it, and that even if we could know it we could not communicate it. The Heraclitean philosopher Cratylus refused to discuss anything and would merely wriggle his finger, claiming that communication is impossible since meanings are constantly changing. Socrates also had skeptical tendencies extensively discussed in Plato's dialogues. He claimed that he knew nothing, or at least nothing worthwhile and challenged those who claimed knowledge of various subjects.

Skepticism developed with regard to various disciplines in which people claimed to have knowledge. It was questioned, for example, whether one could gain any certain knowledge in metaphysics, the philosophical study of the basic nature, structure, or elements of reality, as well as in the sciences. In ancient times, a chief form of skepticism was medical skepticism, which questioned whether one could know with certainty either the causes or cures of diseases. In the area of ethics, doubts were raised about accepting various mores and customs and about claiming any objective basis for making judgments of value. A dominant form of skepticism concerns knowledge in general, questioning whether anything actually can be known with complete or adequate certainty. This type is called epistemological skepticism.

The various kinds of epistemological skepticism can be differentiated in terms of the areas in which doubts are raised - that is, whether the doubts are directed toward reason, toward the senses, or toward knowledge of "things-in-themselves" (things as they really are, rather than as they appear to human observers). Forms of skepticism can also be distinguished in terms of the motivation of the skeptic - whether he is challenging views for ideological reasons or for pragmatic or practical ones in order to attain certain psychological goals. Kinds of skepticism can also be distinguished in terms of how restricted or how thoroughgoing they are - whether they apply only to certain areas and to certain kinds of knowledge claims or whether they are more general and universal.

The Eleatic philosophers (pre-Socrates philosophers associated with the Greek city of Elea in Italy) rejected the existence of plurality and change, conceiving of reality as a static one, and they denied that reality could be described in terms of the categories of ordinary experience. The first school of skeptical philosophy developed in the Academy, the school founded by Plato, in the 3rd century BCE and was thus called "Academic" skepticism. Starting from the skeptical doctrines of Socrates, its leaders set forth a series of epistemological arguments to show that nothing could be known, challenging primarily what were then the two foremost schools, Stoicism and Epicureanism. They denied that any criteria could be found for distinguishing the true from the false; instead, only reasonable or probable standards could be established. This limited, or probabilistic, skepticism was the view of the Academy until the 1st century BCE, when the Roman philosopher and orator Cicero was a student there. His *Academica* and *De natura deorum* are the main sources of modern knowledge of this movement. (St. Augustine's *Contra academicos*, composed some five centuries later, was intended as an answer to Cicero's views.)