

Philosophy in the Humanities

Philosophy in the Humanities

*FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT
JACKSONVILLE*



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PART I

FACULTY RESOURCES

I. Request Access



To preserve academic integrity and prevent students from gaining unauthorized access to faculty resources, we verify each request manually.

Contact oyer@achievingthedream.org and we'll get you on your way.

Overview of Faculty Resources

This is a community course developed by an Achieving the Dream grantee. They have either curated or created a collection of faculty resources for this course. Since the resources are openly licensed, you may use them as is or adapt them to your needs.

Now Available

- Assessments (Essays)
- Discussions
- Quizzes

Share Your Favorite Resources

If you have sample resources you would like to share with other faculty teaching this course, please send them with an explanatory message and learning outcome alignment to oeer@achievingthedream.org.

2. I Need Help



Need more information about this course? Have questions about faculty resources? Can't find what you're looking for? Experiencing technical difficulties?

We're here to help! Take advantage of the following Lumen customer-support resources:

- Check out one of Lumen's Faculty User Guides [here](#).
- Submit a support ticket [here](#) and tell us what you need.
- Talk and screen-share with a live human during Lumen's OER office hours. See available times [here](#).

PART II

MODULE I:

INTRODUCTION -
FOUNDATIONS OF
PHILOSOPHY

3. Introduction

Foundations of Philosophy

Module Introduction

This module will focus on the themes of understanding and exploring:

- The meaning of the term philosophy
- The major branches of philosophy
- The meaning of rationality

During the first section of this introductory module, we will learn the origin and academic meaning of the word philosophy. We will explain how it differs from other fields, what the major branches of philosophy are, and briefly introduce the topics of their areas of research. Finally, we will analyze the meaning of the term rationality.

In the second section, we will introduce students to four early philosophers whose works have contributed to our cultural understanding of the meaning of philosophy in significant foundational ways.⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize the relationships between cultural expressions and their contexts.
2. Recognize concepts in metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology and the context of their development.

3. Comprehend the scope of philosophic inquiry and how beliefs are formed and justified especially within a particular cultural construct.

Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Explain the term *Philosophy*.
- Define and distinguish the major branches of Western Philosophy.
- Distinguish the concepts of foundationalism and constructivism as modes of rationality.
- Recognize the contribution of four philosophers to the history of ideas. ⁽¹⁾

Readings & Resources

- [Socrates](#) from Philosophy Pages website
- [Pythagoras](#) from Philosophy Pages website
- [Plato](#) from Philosophy Pages website
- [Boethius](#) from Philosophy Pages website.

Supplemental Materials

(Note: These materials are considered supplemental and thus are not used for assessment purposes)

- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) website
- [Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy](#) by H. F. Stewart and

E. K. Rand. You will use this book in other modules. Please keep it handy

- [Plato, Apology](#)

Assignments & Learning Activities

- Review Introduction
- Review Reading and Resources
- Review Learning Unit
- Participate in Greetings and Introductions
- Participate in Module 1 Discussion

4. What is Philosophy?

Introduction: What is Philosophy? What is Rationality?

Philosophy, derived from the Greek ‘philo’ (love) and ‘sophia’ (wisdom), is literally defined as “the love of wisdom.” More broadly understood, it is the study of the most basic and profound matters of human existence. ⁽²⁾Philosophy, in the West, began in the Greek colony of Miletus. ⁽³⁾

Who are we? How can we be happy? Does the universe have a purpose? ⁽³⁾*What is knowledge? What is really real? Does art have value? Are animals conscious?* ⁽¹⁾Ancient Greek philosophers approached the big questions of life sometimes in a genuinely scientific way, sometimes in a mystical way, but always in a rational and an imaginative fashion. They dared to question traditional conventions and to challenge the prejudices of their ages; sometimes putting their own lives at stake.

Originating in Miletus, but spreading outward in the works of subsequent thinkers and writers, Greek philosophy was to reach its heights in the works of **Plato** and his pupil **Aristotle**. But if tradition is accurate, we can thank the mathematician and mystic **Pythagoras**(famed for his Pythagorean Theorem) for being the first to call himself not a sage, but rather a lover of wisdom; that is, a philosopher. ^(1/2/3)

What do Philosophers Do?

Many fields can be studied and learned without ever actually working with the tools in the field. Philosophy, however, is at much

about the methodology behind deriving answers as it is about the answers themselves.^(4/1) As such, students studying philosophy must use the methodology of philosophy on the philosophy they are learning as they are learning it. Doing philosophy involves asking the right questions, critically examining the work of previous philosophers, truly understanding the works and the reasoning behind the works, and possibly building on the works of previous philosophers by expanding or testing this methodology.⁽⁴⁾

Rationality in Philosophy

Can there be more than one right answer? How do we judge how we know or what to evaluate?

Thinking about how we make decisions is another aspect of philosophy to consider; there are manners in which we evaluate evidence, question assumptions, and establish frameworks for assessing knowledge through methods of questioning and critical reflection. These activities are aspects of rationality.

Foundationalism

Foundationalism holds that basic beliefs exist, which are justified without reference to other beliefs, and that non-basic beliefs must ultimately be justified by basic beliefs, which, in the case of Classical foundationalism, are those that are self-evident. Mental states and immediate experience can be examples of basic beliefs.⁽⁵⁾

Law of Non-Contradiction

The **Law of Non-Contradiction** states that contradictory

statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time, e.g. the two propositions "A is B" and "A is not B" are mutually exclusive. ⁽⁶⁾

Constructivism

Constructivism stems from a number of philosophies. **Constructivist epistemology** is a branch in philosophy of science maintaining that scientific knowledge is constructed by the scientific community, who seek to measure and construct models of the natural world. One version of social constructivism contends that categories of knowledge and reality are actively created by social relationships and interactions. These interactions also alter the way in which scientific episteme is organized. ⁽⁷⁾

The Branches of Philosophy

Theoretical Philosophy

Metaphysics

The Study of Existence (named for Aristotle's work on the subject). Far from being a definitive term in Aristotle's day, the word 'metaphysics' was given to the book by his editor who placed it after his work 'Physics.' In Greek, 'meta' simply means 'after' and the title originally reflected that it came after the book Physics. ⁽²⁾ Metaphysics addresses issues related to reality vs. appearance; it attempts to answer such questions as: *What is really real? What am I? Who Am I? Are we free or determined? Do computers have consciousness?* ⁽¹⁾

Epistemology

The Study of Knowledge (from the Greek 'episteme' meaning 'knowledge' and 'logos' meaning 'word'). Epistemology asks how we know what we know, what exactly is 'knowledge' and why do we have it. Plato attempts, in his dialogue of Meno and elsewhere, to answer these questions by claiming we do not 'learn' but, rather, 'remember' what was learned in a previous existence. Epistemology addresses issues related to knowledge vs. mere opinion; it attempts questions as: *What is Knowledge?* ⁽²⁾*What are the conditions that make knowledge possible? How do you know that you know? Is knowledge even attainable?* ⁽¹⁾

Practical Philosophy

Axiology (Value Theory)

In general, the area studies of ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics all fall under the field of axiology: the study of human values. ⁽¹⁾

Ethics

The Study of Behavior/Action (from the Greek 'ta ethika' meaning 'on character,' which was popularized by Aristotle in his Nichomachean Ethics that he wrote for his son, Nichomachus, as a guide to living well). Ethics is concerned with morality, how one should live, and upon what basis to make decisions. ⁽²⁾*What is the good life? What is the best way to conduct my life?* ⁽¹⁾

Politics

The Study of Governance (from the Greek 'Polis' meaning 'city'). Politikos in Greek meant 'that which has to do with the city.' Far from simply being concerned with running a government, however, Politikos also has to do with how to be a

good citizen and neighbor, and what one should contribute to one's community. This branch, like all the others, was first definitively examined and popularized in the work by Aristotle. ⁽²⁾ *How does one know what is right? What is justice? Is justice possible for everyone? Can there be a justice that is unjust for some?* ⁽¹⁾

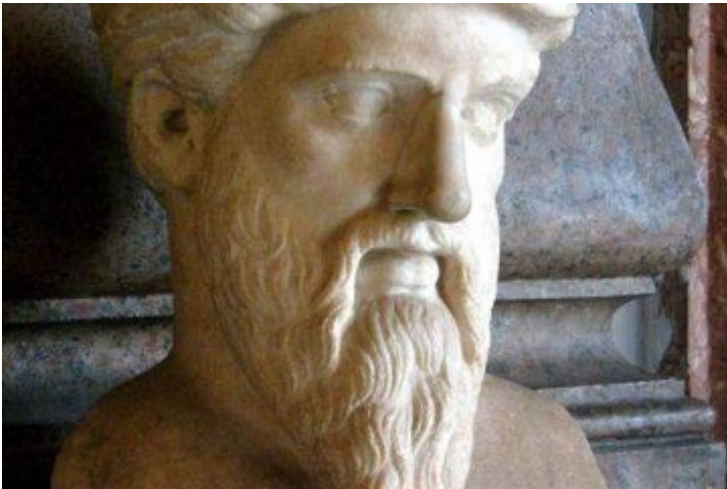
Aesthetics

The Study of Art (from the Greek 'aisthetikos' meaning 'sense/sentience' or 'aisthanomai' meaning 'to perceive or feel.')

Aesthetics concerns itself with the study of beauty, perception of beauty, culture, and even nature, asking the fundamental question, "What makes something that is beautiful or meaningful 'beautiful' or 'meaningful?'" Both Plato and Aristotle give answers to this question, attempting to standardize objectively what is 'beautiful' while the famous Sophist Protagoras argued that if one believes something to be 'beautiful' then it is beautiful, and that all judgements are entirely subjective. ⁽²⁾ *Is there value in the beautiful? What is beauty? What is aesthetic value? Can aesthetic value be objectively measured?* ⁽¹⁾

5. Introducing the Philosophers

Introducing the Philosophers



[Bust of Pythagoras](#) by Skies is license under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Pythagoras (ca. 571 – ca. 497 BCE) is considered one of the Pre-Socratic Ionian thinkers, outside the Milesian school. He was originally from Samos, an offshore Ionian settlement. He settled in Southern Italy and founded his school there. His approach combined science with spiritual tradition. Mathematics, in the sense of demonstrative deductive arguments, began with Pythagoras. He is credited as the author of the first known mathematical formulation, the theorem which states that the square of the longest side of a right triangle equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Deductive reasoning from general premises

seems to have been a Pythagorean innovation as well. He also held the notion of the transmigration of souls. ⁽⁸⁾

Much of Plato's work is influenced by this early tradition. ⁽¹⁾ Plato, in his *Phaedo*, makes use of Pythagoras' link in choosing Echecrates of Phlius as *Phaedo's* audience for the story of Socrates' last day. In that dialogue, Socrates' interlocutors, Simmias and Cebes of Thebes, are both Pythagoreans, and as the dialogue is chiefly concerned with the immortality of the soul as Pythagoras is said to have envisioned it, Plato's choice of Echecrates links the dialogue directly to Pythagorean thought from the first line. Yet what, exactly, was 'Pythagorean thought?' From what was written of him, it would seem Pythagoras founded a religious order that emphasized personal salvation through withdrawal from worldly pursuits and a focus on a strict philosophical and mathematical regimen. The Pythagoreans were vegetarians and believed that the soul was immortal and passed through many incarnations. To Pythagoras, vegetarianism was a path to inner peace and, by extension, world peace in that humans could never live in harmony with each other as long as they killed and ate animals.

Xenophanes, a contemporary, wrote derisively of Pythagoras that, "Once they say that he was passing by when a dog was being whipped and he took pity and said, 'Stop, do not beat it; for it is the soul of a friend that I recognized when I heard it giving tongue.'" Since one could easily be re-born as a cow or a sheep in one's next life, eating any living thing was as strictly prohibited as cannibalism would be. The Transmigration of Souls, as Pythagoras called it, greatly influenced Plato's thought and, perhaps, Socrates himself, in the claim that learning is recollecting, as argued in Plato's *Meno* and mentioned in *Phaedo* and elsewhere. If we die with our mind intact, we will 'remember' what we learned during that life when we are born into our next incarnation. What we think we 'learn' in this life, therefore, we are actually only 'remembering' from our past life. Those whom we term 'child prodigies' then are simply people who remember their former lives better than most do. Most famous today for his Pythagorean Theorem in geometry,

Pythagoras asserted that “things are numbers” and that one could understand the physical world through mathematics. In this way, also, he greatly influenced Plato, as it is known that Plato’s Theory of Forms is chiefly geometry and that Plato admitted any Greek-speaking student into his Academy as long as they knew geometry. To Pythagoras, mathematics was a course of study to pursue toward enlightenment and understanding and, as he allegedly claimed, “Ten is the very nature of number” and by this ‘number’ he meant not only a unit of measurement, but also a means by way of which the world could be grasped and understood. ⁽⁸⁾

6. Socrates

Introducing the Philosophers: Socrates

Socrates (469/470 – 399 BCE) was born to the sculptor Sophroniscus and the mid-wife Phaenarete. He studied music, gymnastics, and grammar in his youth (the common subjects of study for a young Greek) and followed his father's profession as a sculptor. Tradition holds that he was an exceptional artist, and his statue of the Graces, on the road to the Acropolis, is said to have been admired into the 2nd century CE. Socrates served with distinction in the army and, at the Battle of Potidaea, saved the life of the General Alcibiades.

When he was middle-aged, Socrates' friend Chaerephon asked the famous Oracle at Delphi if there was anyone wiser than Socrates, to which the Oracle answered, "None." Bewildered by this answer and hoping to prove the Oracle wrong, Socrates went about questioning people who were held to be 'wise' in their own estimation and that of others. He found, to his dismay, "that the men whose reputation for wisdom stood highest were nearly the most lacking in it, while others who were looked down on as common people were much more intelligent" (Plato, *Apology*, 22). The youth of Athens delighted in watching Socrates question their elders in the market and, soon, he had a following of young men who, because of his example and his teachings, would go on to abandon their early aspirations and devote themselves to philosophy (from the Greek 'Philo', love, and 'Sophia', wisdom – literally 'the love of wisdom'). Among these were Antisthenes (founder of the Cynic school), Aristippus (the Cyrenaic school), Xenophon (whose writings would influence Zeno of Citium, founder of the Stoic school) and, most famously, Plato (the main source of our information of Socrates in his *Dialogues*) among many others. Every major philosophical school mentioned by ancient writers following Socrates' death.

While scholars have traditionally relied upon Plato's *Dialogues* as a source for information on the historical Socrates, Plato's contemporaries claimed he used a character he called 'Socrates' as a mouth-piece for his own philosophical views. Notable among these critics was, allegedly, Phaedo, a fellow student of Socrates, whose writings are now lost, and Xenophon, whose *Memorabilia* presents a different view of Socrates than that presented by Plato.

However his teachings were interpreted, it seems clear that Socrates' main focus was on how to live a good and virtuous life. The claim attributed to him by Plato that "an unexamined life is not worth living" (*Apology*, 38b) seems historically accurate, in that it is clear he inspired his followers to think for themselves instead of following the dictates of society and the accepted superstitions concerning the gods and how one should behave. While there are differences between Plato's and Xenophon's depictions of Socrates, both present a man who cared nothing for class distinctions or 'proper behavior' and who spoke as easily with women, servants, and slaves as with those of the higher classes.

In ancient Athens, individual behavior was maintained by a concept known as 'Eusebia' which is often translated into English as 'piety' but more closely resembles 'duty' or 'loyalty to a course'. In refusing to conform to the social proprieties proscribed by Eusebia, Socrates angered many of the more important men of the city who could, rightly, accuse him of breaking the law by violating these customs.

In 399 BCE Socrates was charged with impiety by Meletus the poet, Anytus the tanner, and Lycon the orator who sought the death penalty in the case. The accusation read: "Socrates is guilty, firstly, of denying the gods recognized by the state and introducing new divinities, and, secondly, of corrupting the young." It has been suggested that this charge was both personally and politically motivated as Athens was trying to purge itself of those associated with the scourge of the Thirty Tyrants of Athens who had only recently been overthrown. Socrates' relationship to this regime was through his former student, Critias, who was considered to be

among the worst of the tyrants and was thought to have been corrupted by Socrates. It has also been suggested, based in part on interpretations of Plato's dialogue of the *Meno*, that Anytus blamed Socrates for corrupting his son. Anytus, it seems, had been grooming his son for a life in politics until the boy became interested in Socrates' teachings and abandoned political pursuits. As Socrates' accusers had Critias as an example of how the philosopher corrupted youth, even if they never used that evidence in court, the precedent appears to have been known to the jury.

Socrates was convicted and sentenced to death (Xenophon tells us that he wished for such an outcome and Plato's account of the trial in his *Apology* would seem to confirm this). The last days of Socrates are chronicled in Plato's *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*, the last dialogue depicting the day of his death (by drinking hemlock) surrounded by his friends in his jail cell in Athens and, as Plato puts it, "Such was the end of our friend, a man, I think, who was the wisest and justest, and the best man I have ever known." ⁽⁹⁾

7. Plato

Introducing the Philosophers: Plato

When Plato was in his late teens or early twenties he heard Socrates teaching in the market and abandoned his plans to pursue a literary career as a playwright; he burned his early work and devoted himself to philosophy.⁽¹⁸⁾ Such is the story of how Plato became a lover of wisdom.⁽¹⁾

It is likely that Plato had known Socrates, at least by reputation, since youth. The Athenian politician, Critias, was Plato's mother's cousin and studied with Socrates as a young man. It has been suggested, therefore, that Socrates was a regular visitor to Plato's family. However this may be, nothing is suggested by the ancient writers to indicate Socrates' influence over Plato until the latter was about 20 years old. Diogenes Laertius (c. 200 CE) writes that Plato was about to compete for the prize in tragedies in the theatre of Bacchus when "he heard the discourse of Socrates and burnt his poems saying, 'Vulcan, come here; for Plato wants your aid' and from henceforth, as they say, being now twenty years old, he became a pupil of Socrates." Nothing is clearly known of Plato's activities for the next eight years save that he studied under the elder philosopher until the latter's trial and execution on the charge of impiety in 399 BCE.

Socrates' execution had a great impact on the then 28 year old and he left Athens to travel, visiting Egypt and Italy among other places, before returning to his homeland to write his dialogues and set up the Academy. His Dialogues almost all feature Socrates as the main character, but whether this is an accurate portrayal of Socrates' actions and beliefs have long been contested. Plato's contemporary, Phaedo, also one of Socrates' students (and best known for Plato's dialogue named after him) contended that Plato placed his own

ideas in Socrates' mouth and made up the dramatic situations of his dialogues. Other philosophers and writers of the time have also questioned the accuracy of Plato's depiction of Socrates but seem in agreement that Plato was a very serious man with lofty ideas, which were difficult for many to grasp.

Though he was respected as a philosopher of enormous talent in his lifetime (he was at least twice kidnapped and ransomed for a high price), he was by no means universally acclaimed. The value of Plato's philosophy was questioned most strenuously by the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope who considered Plato an 'elitist snob' and a 'phony'. When Plato defined a human being as a biped without feathers, Diogenes is said to have plucked a chicken and presented it in Plato's classroom, crying, "Behold, Plato's human being." Plato allegedly replied that his definition would now need to be revised, but this concession to a critic seems to have been an exception rather than the rule. Criticisms aside, however, Plato's work exerted an enormous impact on his contemporaries and those who followed. ⁽⁹⁾

8. Boethius

Introducing the Philosophers: Boethius

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius lived in the last quarter of the fifth century C.E., and the first quarter of the sixth. He was growing to manhood, when Theodoric, the famous Ostrogoth, crossed the Alps and made himself master of Italy. Boethius belonged to an ancient family, which boasted a connection with the legendary glories of the Republic, and was still among the foremost in wealth and dignity in the days of Rome's abasement. His parents dying early, he was brought up by Symmachus, whom the age agreed to regard as of almost saintly character, and afterwards became his son-in-law. His varied gifts, aided by an excellent education, won for him the reputation of the most accomplished man of his time. He was an orator, poet, musician, and philosopher. It is his peculiar distinction to have handed on to the Middle Ages the tradition of Greek philosophy by his Latin translations of the works of Aristotle. Called early to a public career, the highest honors of the State came to him unsought. He was sole Consul in 510 C.E. and was ultimately raised by Theodoric to the dignity of *Magister Officiorum*, or head of the whole civil administration. He was no less happy in his domestic life, in the virtues of his wife, Rusticana, and the fair promise of his two sons, Symmachus and Boethius; happy also in the society of a refined circle of friends. Noble, wealthy, accomplished, universally esteemed for his virtues, high in the favor of the Gothic King, he appeared to all men a signal example of the union of merit and good fortune.

His felicity seemed to culminate in the year 522 C.E. when, by special and extraordinary favor, his two sons, young as they were for so exalted an honor, were created joint Consuls and rode to

the senate-house attended by a throng of senators, and the acclamations of the multitude.

Boethius himself, amid the general applause, delivered the public speech in the King's honor usual on such occasions. Within a year, he was a solitary prisoner at Pavia, stripped of honors, wealth, and friends, with death hanging over him, and a terror worse than death, in the fear lest those dearest to him should be involved in the worst results of his downfall. It is in this situation that the opening of the 'Consolation of Philosophy' brings Boethius before us. He represents himself as seated in his prison distraught with grief, indignant at the injustice of his misfortunes, and seeking relief for his melancholy in writing verses descriptive of his condition. Suddenly there appears to him the Divine figure of Philosophy, in the guise of a woman of superhuman dignity and beauty, who by a succession of discourses convinces him of the vanity of regret for the lost gifts of fortune, raises his mind once more to the contemplation of the true good, and makes clear to him the mystery of the world's moral government.⁽¹⁰⁾

Optional Reading: [Book One](#) from the Consolation of Philosophy

PART III

MODULE 2: FOUNDATIONS OF THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

9. Introduction

Foundations of Theoretical and Practical Philosophy

Module Introduction

Topics

- How are human values evaluated?
- Where do we come from, and where are we going?
- Are we free or determined? *What is the examined life? What is knowledge?

This module will focus on the themes of understanding and exploring:

- The basic ideas of the Pre-Socratic philosophers and other early thinkers
- The differences among monist, pluralist, and atomist theories of ancient cosmology
- The contribution that the ancient philosophers have made to the history of ideas

In the last chapter, we learned about how philosophy has been divided in the West into three major branches, and that Pythagoras, an early Greek philosopher was, according to tradition, the first to coin the term, philosopher-“lover of wisdom”. Pythagoras, in the

history of philosophy, is known as a Pre-Socratic philosopher, because he lived before the time of Socrates.

In this module, we will study the ideas of some of the other Pre-Socratic philosophers and other early thinkers to discover what questions they were asking and trying to answer about themselves and their world, as we explore the foundations of some of our basic philosophical questions in axiology, epistemology, and metaphysics.

We will also introduce the foundations of philosophical questioning in metaphysics and epistemology in the Indian Vedic tradition and early Chinese experience of Zen.⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize the relationships between cultural expressions and their contexts.
2. Recognize concepts in metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology and the context of their development.
3. Comprehend the scope of philosophic inquiry and how beliefs are formed and justified especially within a particular cultural construct.
4. Understand the principles of freedom, determinism and moral responsibility in human interaction.

Objectives

Upon completion of this module, the student will be able to:

- Explain the basic ideas of the Pre-Socratic philosophers *and other early philosophers*.
- Define and distinguish the differences among monist, pluralist, and atomist theories of ancient cosmology.

- Describe the contribution that the ancient philosophers have made to the history of ideas. ⁽¹⁾

Readings & Resources

- [The Ionian Origins of Greek Philosophy Daniel Riaño](#) by danielrianno
- [Two Monks and a Woman – Zen Lesson](#) by ahlhalau
- Video: [Symphony of Science: “We Are All Connected” \(Sub Ita\)](#) by Franko Russo.

Supplemental Materials

(Note: These materials are considered supplemental and thus are not used for assessment purposes)

- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) website
- [Bhagavad Gita](#) from Internet Sacred Text Archive website
- Video: [Time Lapse of Making of a Mandala: The Crow Collection of Asian Art](#) by Melonie Kastman
- [Plato, Republic](#) from Perseus Digital Library website
- [Plato, Phaedo](#) from Perseus Digital Library website
- [Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy](#) by Henry Rosher James

Assignments & Learning Activities

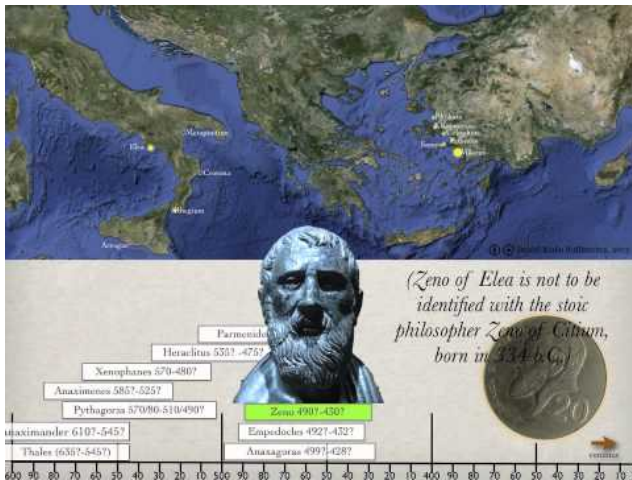
- Review Introduction
- Review Readings and Resources

- Review Learning Unit
- Take Quiz 1

10. Origins of Greek Philosophy

The Pre-Socratics

Video



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://library.achievingthedream.org/fscjphilosophy/?p=29>

Review Video – The Ionian Origins of Greek Philosophy by Daniel Riaño ⁽¹¹⁾

About 600 BCE, the Greek cities of Ionia were the intellectual and cultural leaders of Greece and the number one sea-traders of the Mediterranean. Miletus, the southernmost Ionian city, was the wealthiest of Greek cities and the main focus of the “Ionian awakening” — a name for the initial phase of classical Greek civilization, coincidental with the birth of Greek philosophy.

The first group of Greek philosophers is a triad of Milesian thinkers: Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. Their main contribution was the development and application of theory purely based on empirical observation of natural phenomena. They seemed to all agree on the notion that all things come from a single “primal origin or substance.” Thales believed it was water; Anaximander said it was a substance different from all other known substances, “infinite, eternal and ageless;” and Anaximenes claimed it was air.

Observation was important among the Milesian school. Thales predicted an eclipse, which took place in 585 BCE, and it seems he had been able to calculate the distance of a ship at sea from observations taken at two points. Anaximander, based on the fact that human infants are helpless at birth, argued that if the first human had somehow appeared on earth as an infant, it would not have survived: therefore, humans have evolved from other animals whose offspring are fitter. The science among Milesians was stronger than their philosophy and somewhat rudimentary, but it encouraged observation in many subsequent thinkers and was also a good stimulus to approach in a rational fashion many of the traditional questions that had previously been answered through myth, thus ushering in the epistemological and metaphysical world of the later philosophers. ⁽³⁾

Aristotle, Metaphysics

Reading from [Aristotle, Metaphysics](#)

Book One: Section 1.983b–1.990a.

Most of the earliest philosophers conceived only of material principles as underlying all things. That of which all things consist, from which they first come and into which on their destruction they are ultimately resolved, of which the essence persists although modified by its affections — this, they say, is an element and principle of existing things. Hence, they believe that nothing is either generated or destroyed, since this kind of primary entity always persists. Similarly, we do not say that Socrates comes into being **absolutely** when he becomes handsome or cultured, nor that he is destroyed when he loses these qualities; because the substrate, Socrates himself, persists. In the same way nothing else is generated or destroyed; for there is some one entity (or more than one) which always persists and from which all other things are generated. All are not agreed, however, as to the number and character of these principles.⁽¹²⁾

The Milesians, Thales and Anaximander

Thales, the founder of this school of philosophy, says the permanent entity is water (which is why he also propounded that the earth floats on water). Presumably, he derived this assumption from seeing that the nutriment of everything is moist, and that heat itself is generated from moisture and depends upon it for its existence (and that from which a thing is generated is always its first principle). He derived his assumption, then, from this; and also from the fact that the seeds of everything have a moist nature, whereas water is the first principle of the nature of moist things.⁽¹²⁾

ANAXIMANDER (c 610–c 546 BCE) of Miletus was a student of Thales and recent scholarship argues that he, rather than Thales, should be considered the first western philosopher owing to the

fact that we have a direct and undisputed quote from Anaximander while we have nothing written by Thales. Anaximander invented the idea of models, drew the first map of the world in Greece, and is said to have been the first to write a book of prose. He traveled extensively and was highly regarded by his contemporaries. Among his major contributions to philosophical thought was his claim that the 'basic stuff' of the universe was the apeiron, the infinite and boundless, a philosophical and theological claim which is still debated among scholars today and which, some argue, provided Plato with the basis for his cosmology.

Simplicius writes,

Of those who say that it is one, moving, and infinite, Anaximander, son of Praxiades, a Milesian, the successor and pupil of Thales, said that the principle and element of existing things was the apeiron [indefinite or infinite] being the first to introduce this name of the material principle. He says that it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements but some other apeiron nature, from which come into being all the heavens and the worlds in them. And the source of coming-to-be for existing things is that into which destruction, too, happens 'according to necessity; for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of time,' as he describes it in these rather poetical terms. It is clear that he, seeing the changing of the four elements into each other, thought it right to make none of these the substratum, but something else besides these; and he produces coming-to-be not through the alteration of the element, but by the separation off of the opposites through the eternal motion. (PHYSICS , 24)

This statement by Anaximander regarding elements paying penalty to each other according to the assessment of time is considered the oldest known piece of written Western philosophy.

Thales claimed that the First Cause of all things was water but

Anaximander, recognizing that water was another of the earthly elements, believed that the First Cause had to come from something beyond such an element. His answer to the question of 'Where did everything come from?' was the apeiron, the boundless, but what exactly he meant by 'the boundless' has given rise to the centuries-old debate. Does 'the boundless' refer to a spatial or temporal quality or does it refer to something inexhaustible and undefined?

While it is impossible to say with certainty what Anaximander meant, a better understanding can be gained through his 'long since' argument, which **Aristotle** phrases this way in his PHYSICS .

Some make this First Cause (namely, that which is additional to the elements) the Boundless, but not air or water, lest the others should be destroyed by one of them, being boundless; for they are opposite to one another (the air, for instance, is cold, the water wet, and the fire hot). If any of them should be boundless, it would long since have destroyed the others; but now there is, they say, something other from which they are all generated. (204b25-29)

In other words, none of the observable elements could be the First Cause because all observable elements are changeable and, were one to be more powerful than the others, it would have long since eradicated them. As observed, however, the elements of the earth seem to be in balance with each other, none of them holding the upper hand and, therefore, some other source must be looked to for a First Cause. In making this claim, **Anaximander becomes** the first known philosopher to work in abstract, rather than natural, philosophy and **the first metaphysician** even before the term 'metaphysics' was coined.

He charted the heavens, traveled widely, was the first to claim the earth floated in space, and the first to posit an unobservable First Cause (which, whether it influenced Plato, certainly shares similarities with Aristotle's Prime Mover). Diogenes Laertius writes, "Apollodorus, in his CHRONICLES , states that in the second year of the fifty-eighth Olympiad, [Anaximander] was sixty-four years old. And soon after he died, having flourished much about the same time

as Polycrates, the tyrant, of Samos.” A statue was erected at Miletus in Anaximander’s honor. ⁽¹³⁾

The Eleatics Parmenides and Zeno of Elea

Parmenides (c. 485 BCE) of Elea was a Greek philosopher from the colony of Elea in southern Italy. He is known as the founder of the Eleatic School of philosophy, which taught a strict Monistic view of reality. Philosophical Monism is the belief that all of the sensible world is of one, basic substance and being, un-created and indestructible.

Parmenides was a younger contemporary of Heraclitus who claimed that all things are constantly in motion and change (that the basic ‘stuff’ of life is change itself). Parmenides’ thought could not be further removed from that of Heraclitus in that Parmenides claimed nothing moved, change was impossibility, and that human sense perception could not be relied upon for an apprehension of Truth.

The Philosopher of Changeless Being

According to Parmenides, “There is a way which is and a way which is not” (a way of fact, or truth, and a way of opinion about things) and one must come to an understanding of the way “which is” to understand the nature of life. Known as the Philosopher of Changeless Being, Parmenides’ insistence on an eternal, single Truth and his repudiation of relativism and mutability would greatly influence the young philosopher Plato and, through him, Aristotle (though the latter would interpret Parmenides’ Truth quite differently than his master did). Plato devoted a dialogue to the man, the *Parmenides*, in which Parmenides and his student, Zeno, come

to Athens and instruct a young Socrates in philosophical wisdom. This is quite an homage to the thought of Parmenides in that, in most dialogues, Plato presents Socrates as the wise questioner who needs no instruction from anyone. While Parmenides was an older contemporary of Socrates, it is doubtful the two men ever met.

Zeno of Elea

Zeno of Elea was Parmenides' most famous student and wrote forty paradoxes in defense of Parmenides' claim that change — and even motion — were illusions which one must disregard in order to know the nature of oneself and that of the universe. Zeno's work was intended to clarify and defend Parmenides' statements, such as... reality is One. Nothing is capable of inherently changing in any significant fashion because the very substance of reality is unchangeable and 'nothingness' cannot be comprehended.

Nothing Can Come from Nothing

Even so, it seems that Parmenides' ideas themselves were hard to comprehend for his listeners, necessitating Zeno's mathematical paradoxes. Parmenides' main point, however, was simply that nothing could come from nothing and that 'being' must have always existed.

Being & Not Being

Simply put, his argument is that since 'something' cannot come from 'nothing' then 'something' must have always existed in order

to produce the sensible world. This world we perceive, then, is of one substance – that same substance from which it came – and we who inhabit it share in this same unity of substance. Therefore, if it should appear that a person is born from ‘nowhere’ or that one dies and goes somewhere else, both of these perceptions must be wrong since that which is now can never have been ‘not’ nor can it ever ‘not be’. In this, Parmenides may be developing ideas from the earlier philosopher Pythagoras (c. 571–c.497 BCE) who claimed the soul is immortal and returns to the sensible world repeatedly through reincarnation. If so, however, Parmenides very radically departed from Pythagorean thought which allows that there is plurality present in our reality. To Parmenides, and his disciples of the Eleatic School, such a claim would be evidence of belief in the senses which, they insisted, could never be trusted to reveal the truth. The Eleatic principle that all is one, and unchanging, exerted considerable influence on later philosophers and schools of thought. Besides Plato (who, in addition to the dialogue, Parmenides also addressed Eleatic concepts in his dialogues of the Sophist and the Statesman) the famous Sophist Gorgias employed Eleatic reasoning and principles in his work as Aristotle would also do later, principally in his *Metaphysics*.⁽¹⁴⁾

Pluralists and Atomists

Empedocles, from the ancient Greek city of Akragas, (Agrigentum in Latin), modern Agrigento, in Sicily, appears to have been partly in agreement with the Eleatic School, partly in opposition to it. On the one hand, he maintained the unchangeable nature of substance; on the other, he supposes a plurality of such substances – i.e. four classical elements, earth, water, air, and fire. Of these the world is built up, by the agency of two ideal motive forces – love as the cause of union, strife as the cause of separation.

The first explicitly materialistic system was formed by Leucippus

(5th century BCE) and his pupil **Democritus** of Abdera (460–370 BCE) from Thrace. This was the doctrine of atoms – small primary bodies infinite in number, indivisible and imperishable, qualitatively similar, but distinguished by their shapes. Moving eternally through the infinite void, they collide and unite, thus generating objects which differ in accordance with the varieties, in number, size, shape, and arrangement, of the atoms which compose them.⁽¹⁵⁾

Another View: Creation in the Philosophy of Ancient India: Rig Veda

The philosophical question of cosmogenesis has been approached in many different ways in Greece as we have seen in the beginning of this Module; here is an example of the question's response from another perspective.⁽¹⁾

“Then was neither nonexistent nor existent: there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it. What covered in, and where? And what gave shelter? Was water there, unfathomed depth of water?

The ONE breathed without air by self-impulse; through the heat of tapas (desire) was manifest (1) Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation? The Gods are later than this world's production. Who knows then whence it first came into being? He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it, Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not.”

(Rig-Veda 10.129.1-7)

There is another account on how the universe started, which has no equivalent in any other tradition. The universe is actually the dream of a god who after 100 Brahma years, dissolves himself into a

dreamless sleep, and the universe dissolves with him. After another 100 Brahma years, he recomposes himself and begins to dream again the great cosmic dream. Meanwhile, there are infinite other universes elsewhere, each of them being dreamt by its own god. ⁽¹⁶⁾

What might each of these interpretations conclude should their arguments continue to develop? (The question is rhetorical. You need not consider it an assignment, but rather keep it in mind as we move to the next Module.) ⁽¹⁾

II. The Zen Experience

Preface to the Zen Experience

“The sole aim of Zen is to enable one to understand, realize, and perfect his own mind.” —Garma C. C. Chang



[Lao Tzu, Buddha and Confucius](#) from The Zen Experience by Thomas Hoover is licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

The truth of Zen has always resided in individual experience rather than in theoretical writings... beginning with the twin roots of Zen in Indian Buddhism and Chinese Taoism.

Lao Tzu, Buddha, Confucius

Some call it “seeing,” some call it “knowing,” and some describe it in religious terms. Whatever the name, it is our reach for a new level of consciousness. Of the many forms this search has taken, perhaps the most intriguing is Zen. Growing out of the wisdom of China, India, and Japan, Zen became a powerful movement to explore the

lesser-known reaches of the human mind. Today, Zen has come westward, where we are rediscovering modern significance in its ancient insights. This book is an attempt to encounter Zen in its purest form, by returning to the greatest Zen masters.

Zen teachings often appear deceptively simple. This misconception is compounded by the Zen claim that explanations are meaningless. They are, of course, but merely because genuine Zen insights can arise only from individual experience. And although our experience can be described and even analyzed, it cannot be transmitted or shared. At most, the “teachings” of Zen can only clear the way to our deeper consciousness. The rest is up to us.

Zen is based on the recognition of two incompatible types of thought: rational and intuitive. Rationality employs language, logic, and reason. Its precepts can be taught. Intuitive knowledge, however, is different. It lurks embedded in our consciousness, beyond words. Unlike rational thought, intuition cannot be “taught” or even turned on. In fact, it is impossible to find or manipulate this intuitive consciousness using our rational mind—any more than we can grasp our own hand or see our own eye.

The Zen masters devised ways to reach this repressed area of human consciousness. Some of their techniques — like meditation — were borrowed from Indian Buddhism, and some — like their antirational paradoxes — may have been learned from Chinese Taoists. But other inventions, like their jarring shouts and blows, emerged from their own experience. Throughout it all, however, their words and actions were only a means, never an end.

That end is an intuitive realization of a single great insight — that we and the world around us are one, both part of a larger encompassing absolute. Our rational intellect merely obscures this truth, and consequently we must shut it off, if only for a moment. Rationality constrains our mind; intuition releases it. The irony is that person glimpsing this moment of higher consciousness, this Oneness, encounters the ultimate realization that there is nothing to realize. The world is still there, unchanged. But the difference is that it is now an extension of our consciousness, seen directly

and not analytically. And since it is redundant to be attached to something already a part of you, there is a sudden sense of freedom from our agonizing bondage to things.

Along with this also comes release from the constraints of artificial values. Creating systems and categories is not unlike counting the colors of a rainbow — both merely detract from our experience of reality, while at the same time limiting our appreciation of the world's richness. And to declare something right or wrong is similarly nearsighted. As Alan Watts once observed, "Zen unveils behind the urgent realm of good and evil a vast region of oneself about which there need be no guilt or recrimination, where at last the self is indistinguishable from God." And, we might add, where God is also one with our consciousness, our self. In Zen all dualities dissolve, absorbed in the larger reality that simply is.

None of these things is taught explicitly in Zen. Instead they are discovered waiting in our consciousness after all else has been swept away. A scornful twelfth-century Chinese scholar summarized the Zen method as follows: "Since the Zen masters never run the risk of explaining anything in plain language, their followers must do their own pondering and puzzling — from which a real threshing-out results." In these pages we will watch the threshing-out of Zen itself — as its masters unfold a new realm of consciousness, the Zen experience. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Taoism: The Way to Zen

Taoism is the original religion of ancient China. It is founded on the idea that a fundamental principle, the Tao, underlies all nature. Long before the appearance of Zen, Taoists were teaching the superiority of intuitive thought, using an anti-intellectualism that often ridiculed the logic-bound limitations of conventional Chinese life and letters. However, Taoism was always upbeat and positive in its acceptance of reality, a quality that also rubbed off on Zen over

the centuries. Furthermore, many Taoist philosophers left writings whose world view seems almost Zen-like. The early Chinese teachers of meditation (called dhyana in Sanskrit and Ch'an in Chinese) absorbed the Taoist tradition of intuitive wisdom, and later Zen masters often used Taoist expressions. It is fitting, therefore, that we briefly meet some of the most famous teachers of Chinese Taoism. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Lao Tzu

One of the most influential figures in ancient Chinese lore is remembered today merely as Lao Tzu (Venerable Master). Taoist legends report he once disputed (and bettered) the scholarly Confucius, but that he finally despaired of the world and rode an oxcart off into the west, pausing at the Han-ku Pass — on the insistence of its keeper — to set down his insights in a five-thousand-character poem. This work, the Tao Te Ching (The Way and the Power), was an eloquent, organized, and lyrical statement of an important point of view in China of the sixth century B.C., an understanding later to become an essential element of Ch'an Buddhism.

The word “Tao” means many, many things — including the **elan vital** or life force of the universe, the harmonious structuring of human affairs, and — perhaps most important — a reality transcend-ing words. Taoists declared there is a knowledge not accessible by language. As the Tao Te Ching announces in its opening line, “The Tao that can be put into words is not the real Tao.”

Also fundamental to the Tao is the unity of mind and matter, of the one who knows and the thing known. The understanding of a truth and the truth itself cannot be separated. The Tao includes and unifies these into a larger “reality” encompassing both. The notion that our knowledge is distinguishable from that known is an illusion.

Another teaching of the Tao Te Ching is that intuitive insight surpasses rational analysis. When we act on our spontaneous judgment, we are almost always better off. Chapter 19 declares, “Let the people be free from discernment and relinquish intellection... Hold to one’s original nature... Eliminate artificial learning and one will be free from anxieties.” The wise defer to a realm of insight floating in our mind beyond its conscious state.

Taoists also questioned the value of social organization, holding that the best government is the one governing least and that “the wise deal with things through non-interference and teach through no-words. Taoists typically refused to draw value judgments on others’ behavior. Lao Tzu asks, “What is the difference between good and bad?” and concludes, “Goodness often turns out to be evil.” There is complete acceptance of what is, with no desire to make things “better.” Lao Tzu believed “good” and “bad” were both part of Tao and therefore, “Even if a man is unworthy, Tao will never exclude him.” If all things are one, there can be no critical differentiation of any part. This concentration on inner perception, to the exclusion of practical concerns, evoked a criticism from the third-century-B.C. Confucian philosopher Hsun Tzu that has a curiously modern ring of social consciousness. “Lao Tzu understood looking inward, but knew nothing of looking outward.... If there is merely inward-looking and never outward-looking, there can be no distinction between what value has and what has not, between what is precious and what is vile, between what is noble and what is vulgar.” But the refusal of Lao Tzu to intellectualize what is natural or to sit in judgment over the world was the perfect Chinese precedent for Ch’an.⁽¹⁷⁾

Chuang Tzu

The second important figure in Taoism is the almost equally legendary teacher remembered as Chuang Tzu, who is usually

placed in the fourth century B.C., some two centuries after Lao Tzu. An early historian tells that once Chuang Tzu was invited to the court to serve as a minister, an invitation he declined with a typical story: An ox is selected for a festival and fattened up for several years, living the life of wealth and indulgence — until the day he is led away for sacrifice. At that reckoning what would he give to return to the simple life, where there was poverty but also freedom?

In Chuang Tzu's own book of wisdom, he also derided the faith in rationality common to Chinese scholars. To emphasize his point, he devised a vehicle for assaulting the apparatus of logic — that being a “nonsense” story whose point could only be understood intuitively. There has yet to be found a more deadly weapon against pompous intellectualizing, as the Ch'an Buddhists later proved with the **koan**. Chuang Tzu also knew how quickly comedy could deflate, and he used it with consummate skill, again paving the way for the absurdist Zen masters. In fact, his dialogues often anticipate the Zen **mondo**, the exchanges between master and pupil that have comic/straight-man overtones.

In this regard, Chuang Tzu also sometimes anticipates twentieth-century writers for the Theater of the Absurd, such as Beckett or Ionesco. Significantly, the Columbia scholar Burton Watson suggests that the most fruitful path to Chuang Tzu “is not to attempt to subject his thoughts to rational and systematic analysis, but to read and reread his words until one has ceased to think of what he is saying and instead has developed an intuitive sense of the mind moving beyond the words, and of the world in which it moves.” This is undoubtedly true. The effect of comic parody on logic is so telling that the only way to really understand the message is to stop trying to “understand” it.

Concerning the limitations of verbal transmission, Chuang Tzu tells a story of a wheelmaker who once advised his duke that the book of ancient thought the man was reading was “nothing but the lees and scum of bygone men.” The duke angrily demanded an explanation — and received a classic defense of the superiority of intuitive understanding over language and logic.

I look at the matter in this way; when I am making a wheel, if my stroke is too slow, then it bites deep but is not steady; if my stroke is too fast, then it is steady, but does not go deep. The right pace, neither slow nor fast, cannot get into the hand unless it comes from the heart. It is a thing that cannot be put into words; there is an art in it that I cannot explain to my son. That is why it is impossible for me to let him take over my work, and here I am at the age of seventy, still making wheels. In my opinion, it must have been the same with the men of old. All that was worth handing on died with them; the rest, they put into their books.

Chuang Tzu's parable that perhaps best illustrates the Taoist ideal concerns a cook who had discovered one lives best by following nature's rhythms. The cook explained that his natural-ness was easy after he learned to let intuition guide his actions. This approach he called practicing the Tao, but it is in fact the objective of Zen practice as well.

Prince Wen Hui remarked, "How wonderfully you have mastered your art." The cook laid down his knife and said, "What your servant really cares for is Tao, which goes beyond mere art. When I first began to cut up oxen, I saw nothing but oxen. After three years of practicing, I no longer saw the ox as a whole. I now work with my spirit, not with my eyes. My senses stop functioning and my spirit takes over."

What he described is the elimination of the rational mind, which he refers to as the senses, and the reliance upon the intuitive part of his mind, here called the spirit. He explained how this intuitive approach allowed him to work naturally.

A good cook changes his knife once a year because he cuts, while a mediocre cook has to change his every month because he hacks. I've had this knife of mine for nineteen years and have cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the edge is as

if it were fresh from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints. The blade of the knife has no thickness. That which has no thickness has plenty of room to pass through these spaces. Therefore, after nineteen years, my blade is as sharp as ever.

Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu did not see themselves as founders of any formal religion. They merely described the obvious, encouraging others to be a part of nature and not its antagonist. Their movement, now called Philosophical Taoism, was eclipsed during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) in official circles by various other systems of thought, most particularly Confucianism (which stressed obedience to authority – both that of elders and of superiors – and reverence for formalized learning, not to mention the acceptance of a structured hierarchy as part of one's larger social responsibility). However, toward the end of the Han era, there arose two new types of Taoism: an Esoteric Taoism that used physical disciplines to manipulate consciousness, and a Popular Taoism that came close to being a religion in the traditional mold. The first was mystical Esoteric Taoism, which pursued the prolonging of life and vigor, but this gave way during later times to Popular Taoism, a metaphysical alternative to the comfortless, arid Confucianism of the scholarly establishment.

The post-Han era saw the Philosophical Taoism of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu emerge anew among Chinese intellectuals, actually coming to vie with Confucianism. This whole era witnessed a turning away from the accepted values of society, as the well-organized government of the Han era dissolved into political and intellectual confusion. Government was unstable and corrupt, and the Confucianism which had been its philosophical under-pinning was stilted and unsatisfying. Whenever a society breaks down, the belief system supporting it naturally comes under question. This happened in China in the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era, and from it emerged a natural opposition to Confucianism. One form of this opposition was the imported religion of Buddhism,

which provided a spiritual solace missing in the teachings of Confucius, while the other was a revival among intellectuals of Philosophical Taoism.⁽¹⁷⁾

Kuo Hsiang: A Neo-Taoist

In this disruptive environment, certain intellectuals returned again to the insights of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, creating a movement today known as Neo-Taoism. One of the thinkers who tried to reinterpret original Taoist ideas for the new times was Kuo Hsiang (d. ca. 312), who co-authored a major document of Neo-Taoism titled “Commentary on the Chuang Tzu.” It focused on the important Taoist idea of **wu-wei**, once explained as follows: “...to them the key concept of Taoism, **wu** (literally, nonexistence), is not nothingness, but pure being, which transcends forms and names, and precisely because it is absolute and complete, can accomplish everything. The sage is not one who withdraws into the life of a hermit, but a man of social and political achievements, although these achievements must be brought about through wu-wei, ‘nonaction’ or ‘taking no [unnatural] action.’”

This concept of **wu-wei** has also been described as abstaining from activity contrary to nature and acting in a spontaneous rather than calculated fashion. In Kuo Hsiang’s words:

Being natural means to exist spontaneously without having to take any action.... By taking no action is not meant folding one’s arms and closing one’s mouth. If we simply let everything act by itself, it will be contented with its nature and destiny.

Kuo Hsiang’s commentary expanded on almost all the major ideas of Chuang Tzu, drawing out with logic what originally had been set in absurdism. Criticizing this, a later Ch’an monk observed, “People say Kuo Hsiang wrote a commentary on Chuang Tzu. I would say it was Chuang Tzu who wrote a commentary on Kuo Hsiang.”

Nonethe-less, the idea of **wu-wei** , processed through Buddhism, emerged in different guise in later Ch'an, influencing the concept of "no-mind."⁽¹⁷⁾

The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove

Other Chinese were content merely to live the ideas of Neo-Taoism. Among these were the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove — men part of a larger movement known as the **School of Pure Conversation** . Their favorite pastime was to gather north of Loyang on the estate of one of their members, where they engaged in refined conversation, wrote poetry and music, and (not incidentally) drank wine. To some extent they reflected the recluse ideal of old, except that they found the satisfaction of the senses no impediment to introspec-tion. What they did forswear, however, was the world of getting and spending. Although men of distinction, they rejected fame, ambition, and worldly station.

There is a story that one of the Seven Sages, a man named Liu Ling (ca. 221–330), habitually received guests while completely naked. His response to adverse comments was to declare, "I take the whole universe as my house and my own room as my clothing. Why, then, do you enter here into my trousers?"

It is also told that two of the sages (Juan Chi, 210–63, and his nephew Juan Hsien) often sat drinking with their family in such conviviality that they skipped the nuisance of cups and just drank directly from a wine bowl on the ground. When pigs wandered by, these too were invited to sip from the same chalice. If one exempts all nature — including pigs — from distinction, discrimination, and duality, why exclude them as drinking companions?

But perhaps the most significant insight of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove was their recognition of the limited uses of language. We are told, "They engaged in conversation 'til, as they put

it, they reached the Unnameable, and ‘stopped talking and silently understood each other with a smile.”⁽¹⁷⁾

12. Roots of Zen

The Buddhist Roots of Zen

There is a legend that the Buddha was once handed a flower and asked to preach on the law. The story says he received the blossom without a sound and silently wheeled it in his hand. Then amid the hush, his most perceptive follower, Kashyapa, suddenly burst into a smile... and thus was born the wordless wisdom of Zen.

The understanding of this silent insight was passed down through the centuries, independent of the scriptures, finally emerging as the Chinese school of Ch'an, later called Zen by the Japanese. It is said the absence of early writings about the school is nothing more than would be expected of a teaching which was, by definition, beyond words. The master Wen-yu summed it up when he answered a demand for the First Principle of Ch'an with, "If words could tell you, it would become the Second Principle."

This version of Zen's origin is satisfying, and for all we know it may even be true. But there are other, considerably more substantive, sources for the ideas that came to flower as Ch'an. Taoism, of course, had plowed away at the Confucianist clutter restraining the Chinese mind, but it was Buddhism that gave China the necessary new philosophical structure — this being the meta-physical speculations of India. Pure Chinese naturalism met Indian abstraction, and the result was Ch'an. The school of Ch'an was in part the grafting of fragile foreign ideas (Buddhism) onto a sturdy native species of understanding (Taoism). But its simplicity was in many ways a re-expression of the Buddha's original insights.⁽¹⁷⁾

The Buddha

The historic Buddha was born to the high-caste family Gautama during the sixth century B.C. in the region that is today northeast India and Nepal. After a childhood and youth of indulgence, he turned to asceticism and for over half a decade rigorously followed the traditional Indian practices of fasting and meditation, only finally to reject these in despair. However, an auspicious dream and one final meditation at last brought total enlightenment. Gautama the seeker had become Buddha the Enlightened, and he set out to preach.

It was not gods that concerned him, but the mind of man and its sorrowing. We are unhappy, he explained, because we are slaves to our desires. Extinguish desire and suffering goes with it. If people could be taught that the physical or phenomenal world is illusion, then they would cease their attachment to it, thereby finding release from their self-destructive mental bondage.

The Buddha neglected to set down these ideas in written form, however, perhaps unwisely leaving this task to later generations. His teachings subsequently were recreated in the form of sermons or sutras. In later years, the Buddhist movement split into two separate philosophical camps, known today as Theravada and Mahayana. The Theravada Buddhists — found primarily in southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and Burma — venerate the early writings of Buddhism (known today as the Pali Canon) and tend to content themselves with practicing the philosophy of the Buddha rather than enlarging upon it with speculative commentaries. By contrast, the followers of Mahayana — who include the bulk of all Buddhists in China, Japan, and Tibet — left the simple prescriptions of the Buddha far behind in their creation of a vast new literature (in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese) of complex theologies. Chinese Ch'an grew out of Mahayana, as of course did Japanese Zen. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Nagarjuna

After the Buddha, perhaps the most important Buddhist figure is the second-century A.D. Indian philosopher Nagarjuna. Some call him the most important thinker Asia has produced. According to Tibetan legends, his parents sent him away from home at seven because an astrologer had predicted his early death and they wished to be spared the sight. But he broke the spell by entering Buddhist orders, and went on to become the faith's foremost philosopher.

Today Nagarjuna is famous for his analysis of the so-called Wisdom Books of Mahayana, a set of Sanskrit sutras composed between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100. (Included in this category are The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines, as well as the Diamond Sutra and Heart Sutra, both essential scriptures of Zen.) Nagarjuna was the originator of the Middle Path, so named because it strove to define a middle ground between affirmation of the world and complete negation of existence.

Reality, said Nagarjuna, cannot be realized through conceptual constructions, since concepts are contained inside reality, not vice versa. Consequently, only through the intuitive mind can reality be approached. His name for this "reality" beyond the mind's analysis was **sunyata**, usually translated as "emptiness" but sometimes as "the Void." (**Sunyata** is perhaps an unprovable concept, but so too are the ego and the unconscious, both hypothetical constructs useful in explaining reality but impossible to locate on the operating table.) Nagarjuna's most-quoted manifesto has the logic-defying ring of a Zen: "Nothing comes into existence nor does anything disappear. Nothing is eternal, nor has anything any end. Nothing is identical or differentiated. Nothing moves hither and thither."

As the Ch'an teachers interpreted the teaching of **sunyata**, the things of this world are all a mental creation, since external phenomena are transient and only exist for us because of our perception. Consequently, they are actually "created" by our mind (or, if you will, a more universal entity called Mind). Consequently,

they do not exist outside our mind and hence are a void. Yet the mind itself, which is the only thing real, is also a void since its thoughts cannot be located by the five senses. The Void is therefore everything, since it includes both the world and the mind. Hence, **sunyata** .

As a modern Nagarjuna scholar has described **sunyata** , or emptiness, it is a positive sense of freedom, not a deprivation.

“This awareness of ‘emptiness’ is not a blank loss of consciousness, an inanimate space; rather it is the cognition of daily life without the attachment to it. It is an awareness of distinct entities, of the self, of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and other practical determinations; but it is aware of these as empty structures.”

The Zen masters found ways to achieve the cognition without attachment postulated by Nagarjuna, and they paid him homage by making him one of the legendary twenty-eight Indian Patriarchs of Zen by posthumous decree. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Kumarajiva

The Indian missionary who transmitted the idea of Emptiness to China was Kumarajiva (344–413) a swashbuckling guru who, more than any other individual, was responsible for planting sophisticated Mahayana Buddhist ideas in Chinese soil. Before telling his story, however, it may be well to reflect briefly on how Buddhism got to China in the first place.

Although there are records of a Buddhist missionary in China as early as A.D. 148, historians are hard pressed to find the name of an out-and-out native Chinese Buddhist before sometime in the third century. Buddhism, which at first apparently was confused with Taoism, seems to have come into fashion after the Neo-Taoists ran out of creative steam. Shortly thereafter, around A.D. 209,

intelligible Chinese translations of Indian Mahayana sutras finally began to become available.

There were many things about Buddhism, however, that rubbed Chinese the wrong way. First there were the practical matters: Buddhism allowed, if not encouraged, begging, celibacy, and neglect of ancestors — all practices to rankle any traditional Chinese. Then there were fundamental philosophical differences: Buddhism offered to break one out of the Hindu cycle of rebirth, something the Chinese had not realized they needed; and Indian thought was naturally geared to cosmic time, with its endless cycles of eons, whereas the Chinese saw time as a line leading back to identifiable ancestors. Early missionaries tried to gain acceptability for Buddhism by explaining it in Taoist terms, including stretching the two enough to find “matching concepts” or ideas with superficial similarity, and they also let out the myth that the Buddha was actually Lao Tzu, who had gone on to India after leaving China.

When barbarians sacked the Northern Chinese center of Loyang in the year 313 and took over North China’s government, many of its influential Confucianist scholars, fled to the south. These emigres were disillusioned with the social ideas of Confucianism and ready for a solace of the spirit. Thus they turned for comfort to Buddhist ideas, but using Neo-Taoist terminology and often treating Buddhism more as a subject for salon speculations than as a religion. By translating Buddhism into a Neo-Taoist framework, these southern intellectuals effectively avoided having to grapple with the new ideas in Buddhist metaphysics.

In North China, the Buddhists took advantage of the new absence of competing Confucianists to move into ruling circles and assume the role of the literate class. They preached a simple form of Buddhism, often shamelessly dwelling on magic and incantations to arouse interest among the greatest number of followers. The common people were drawn to Buddhism, since it provided for the first time in China a religion that seemed to care for people’s suffering, their personal growth, their salvation in an afterlife. Thus Buddhism took hold in North China mainly because it provided

hope and magic for the masses and a political firewall against Confucianism for the new rulers. As late as the beginning of the fifth century, therefore, Buddhism was misunderstood and encouraged for the wrong reasons in both north and south.

Kumarajiva, who would change all this, was born in Kucha to an Indian father of the Brahmin caste and a mother of noble blood. When he was seven he and his mother traveled to Kashmir to enter Buddhist orders together. After several years of studying the Theravada sutras, he moved on to Kashgar, where he turned his attention to Mahayana philosophy. At age twenty we find him back in Kucha, being ordained in the king's palace and sharpening his understanding of the Mahayana scriptures. He also, we are told, sharpened his non-Buddhist amorous skills, perhaps finding consolation in the illusory world of the senses for the hollow emptiness of **sunyata** .

In the year 382 or 383, he was taken captive and removed to a remote area in northeastern China, where he was held prisoner for almost two decades, much to the dismay of the rulers in Ch'ang-an, who wanted nothing more than to have this teacher (who was by then a famous Buddhist scholar) for their own. After seventeen years their patience ran out and they sent an army to defeat his recalcitrant captors and bring him back. He arrived in Ch'ang-an in the year 401 and immediately began a project crucial to the future of Chinese Buddhism. A modern scholar of Chinese religion tells what happened next.

"...Chinese monks were assembled from far and near to work with him in translating the sacred texts. This was a 'highly structured project,' suggestive of the cooperative enterprises of scientists today. There were corps of specialists at all levels: those who discussed doctrinal questions with Kumarajiva, those who checked the new translations against the old and imperfect ones, hundreds of editors, sub-editors, and copyists. The quality and quantity of the translations produced by these men in the space of eight years is truly astounding. Thanks to

their efforts the ideas of Mahayana Buddhism were presented in Chinese with far greater clarity and precision than ever before. Sunyata — Nagarjuna's concept of the Void — was disentangled from the Taoist terminology that had obscured and distorted it, and this and other key doctrines of Buddhism were made comprehensible enough to lay the intellectual foundations of the great age of independent Chinese Buddhism that was to follow."

The Chinese rulers contrived to put Kumarajiva's other devotion to use as well, installing a harem of ten beautiful young Chinese girls for him, through whom he was encouraged to perpetuate a lineage of his own. This genetic experiment apparently came to nothing, but two native Chinese studying under him, Seng-chao (384–414) and Tao-sheng (ca. 360–434), would carry his contribution through the final steps needed to open the way for the development of Ch'an.⁽¹⁷⁾

Seng-Chao

The short-lived Seng-chao was born to a humble family in the Ch'ang-an region, where he reportedly got his indispensable ground-ing in the Chinese classics by working as a copyist. He originally was a confirmed Taoist, but after reading the sutra of Vimalakirti (which described a pious nobleman who combined the secular life of a bon vivant businessman with an inner existence of Buddhist enlighten-ment, a combination instantly attractive to the practical Chinese), Seng-chao turned Buddhist. In the year 398, at age fifteen, he traveled to the northwest to study personally under the famous Kumarajiva, and he later returned to Ch'ang-an with the master.

Conversant first in the Taoist and then in the Buddhist classics, Seng-chao began the real synthesis of the two that would eventually evolve into Ch'an. The China scholar Walter Liebenthal has written

that the doctrine of Nagarjuna's Middle Path, Sinicized by Seng-chao, emerged in the later Ch'an thinkers cleansed of the traces of Indian origin. He declares, "Seng-chao interpreted Mahayana, [the Ch'an founders] Hui-neng and Shen-hui re-thought it."

Three of Seng-chao's treatises exist today as the Book of Chao (or Chao Lun), and they give an idea of how Chuang Tzu might have written had he been a Buddhist. There is the distrust of words, the unmistakable preference for immediate, intuitive knowledge, and the masterful use of wordplay and paradox that leaves his meaning ambiguous. Most important of all, he believed that truth had to be experienced, not reasoned out. Truth was what lay behind words; it should never be confused with the words themselves:

"A thing called up by a name may not appear as what it is expected to appear; a name calling up a thing may not lead to the real thing. Therefore the sphere of Truth is beyond the noise of verbal teaching. How then can it be made the subject of discussion? Still I cannot remain silent."

The dean of Zen scholars, Heinrich Dumoulin, declares, "The relationship of Seng-chao to Zen is to be found in his orientation toward the immediate and experiential perception of absolute truth, and reveals itself in his preference for the paradox as the means of expressing the inexpressible." Dumoulin also notes that the Book of Chao regards the way to enlightenment as one of gradual progress. However, the idea that truth can be approached gradually was disputed by the other major pupil of Kumarajiva, whose insistence that enlightenment must arrive instantaneously has caused some to declare him the ideological founder of Zen. ⁽¹⁷⁾

Tao-Sheng

The famous Tao-sheng was the first Chinese Buddhist to advance the idea of "sudden" enlightenment, and as a result he earned the

enmity of his immediate colleagues—and lasting fame as having anticipated one of the fundamental innovations of Zen thought. He first studied Buddhism at Lu-shan, but in 405 he moved to Ch'ang-an, becoming for a while a part of the coterie surrounding Kumarajiva. None of his writings survive, but the work of a colleague, Hui-yuan, is usually taken as representative of his ideas.

Tao-sheng is known today for two theories. The first was that good deeds do not automatically bring reward, a repudiation of the Indian Buddhist concept of merit. The other, and perhaps more important, deviation he preached was that enlightenment was instantaneous. The reason, he said, was simple: since Buddhists say the world is one, nothing is divisible, even truth, and therefore the subjective understanding of truth must come all at once or not at all. Preparatory work and progress toward the goal of enlightenment, including study and meditation, could proceed step-by-step and are wholesome and worthwhile, but to “reach the other shore,” as the phrase in the Heart Sutra describes enlightenment, requires a leap over a gulf, a realization that must hit you with all its force the first time.

What exactly is it that you understand on the other shore? First you come to realize — as you can only realize intuitively and directly — that enlightenment was within you all along. You become enlightened when you finally recognize that you already had it. The next realization is that there actually is no “other shore,” since reaching it means realizing that there was nothing to reach. As his thoughts have been quoted: “As to reaching the other shore, if one reaches it, one is not reaching the other shore. Both not-reaching and not-not-reaching are really reaching.... If one sees Buddha, one is not seeing Buddha. When one sees there is no Buddha, one is really seeing Buddha.”

Little wonder Tao-sheng is sometimes credited as the spiritual father of Zen. He championed the idea of **sudden enlightenment**, something inimical to much of the Buddhism that had gone before, and he distrusted words (comparing them to a net which, after it has caught the fish of truth, should be discarded). He identified

the Taoist idea of **wu-wei** or “nonaction” with the intuitive, spontaneous apprehension of truth without logic, opening the door for the Ch’an mainstay of “no-mind” as a way to ultimate truth. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The Synthesis of the Zen Experience

Buddhism has always maintained a skeptical attitude toward reality and appearances, something obviously at odds with the wholehearted celebration of nature that characterizes Taoism. Whereas Buddhism believes it would be best if we could simply ignore the world, the source of our psychic pain, the Taoists wanted nothing so much as to have complete union with this same world. Buddhism teaches union with the Void, while Taoism teaches union with the Tao. At first they seem opposite directions. But the synthesis of these doctrines appeared in Zen, which taught that the oneness of the Void, wherein all reality is subsumed, could be understood as an encompassing whole or continuum, as in the Tao. Both are merely expressions of the Absolute. The Buddhists unite with the Void; the Taoists yearn to merge with the Tao. In Zen the two ideas reconcile. ⁽¹⁷⁾

PART IV

MODULE 3: EXPLORING AXIOLOGY

13. Introduction

Exploring Axiology

Module Introduction

Topics

Human Value systems:

- Ethics, Aesthetics
- Social and Political Philosophy
- Cross-Cultural Moral Schemata

This module will focus on the themes of understanding and exploring:

- The purpose of moral responsibility
- The foundations of human value theory
- The various cultural attempts to formulate and define social justice

How Should One Live? Two Models

Introduction: Socrates and Arjuna

At the end of the first module, we met the philosopher Socrates. In this module, we will learn much more about why he is so important to the history of philosophy, through studying about his famous trial and defense, made immortal in the writings of Plato.

We will also meet Arjuna, a major character in India's great epic, *The Mahabharata*, within which resides along philosophical interlude known as the *Bhagavad Gita*, (literally, *Song of Manifestation or Song of God*). The *Gita* contains an extraordinary conversation between Arjuna and his charioteer, Krishna, who is also believed by many to be the *Avatara* (divine manifestation) of the deity Vishnu.

Here, our quest is to look at the origin of how early philosophers answered the question, "how is a person to act when faced with an ambiguous choice?" In other words, if there doesn't appear to be an easy right or wrong answer, or one's values clash, how should one act?

The case studies, one from Greece, the other India, present glimpses of two approaches to ethical decision making as we explore the foundations of practical philosophy. ⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize the relationships between cultural expressions and their contexts.
2. Understand cultural expressions.
3. Interpret and evaluate cultural artifacts and/or their contexts for significance.
4. Recognize concepts in metaphysics, axiology, and

- epistemology and the context of their development.
5. Comprehend the scope of philosophic inquiry and how beliefs are formed and justified especially within a particular cultural construct.
 6. Understand the principles of freedom, determinism and moral responsibility in human interaction.
 7. Identify the various attempts to formulate and define social justice.

Objectives

Upon completion of this module the student will be able to:

1. Describe the Socratic method and divine command theory.
2. Identify Socrates, Arjuna, Bhagavad Gita, and describe how artha, kama dharma, and moksha are related to Hindu philosophy. ⁽¹⁾

Readings & Resources

Review Learning Unit 3 as a required reading. The following are additional resources.

- The Speech of Socrates from the [Plato, Apology](#) (17a-42a) from Perseus Digital Library
- [Plato, Euthyphro , Crito, Phaedo](#) from Perseus Digital Library

Supplemental Materials

(Note: These materials are considered supplemental and thus are not used for assessment purposes)

- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) website
- [Plato, Euthyphro](#), Crito sel. from Perseus Digital Library website
- [Boethius](#), The Consolation of Philosophy, sel. translated by I.T. (1609) and revised by H. F. Stewart
- [Kant: The Moral Order](#) by Garth Kemerling from The Philosophy Pages website
- [John Stuart Mill](#), by Garth Kemerling from The Philosophy Pages website
- [Mahabharata \(by Peter Brook\) – Krishna talks to Prince Arjuna](#) by Peacefulness from YouTube

Assignments & Learning Activities

- Review Introduction
- Review Readings and Resources
- Review Learning Unit
- Participate in Module 3 Discussion
- Work on Assignment: Critical Analysis Essay

14. The Bhagavad Gita

Practical Philosophy in the Bhagavad Gita:

The Ethics of Decision Making in the Battlefield of Life

The Bhagavad Gita is an ancient Indian text that became an important work of Hindu tradition in terms of both literature and philosophy. The name Bhagavad Gita means “the song of the Lord or the ‘manifested one.’” It is composed as a poem, and it contains many key topics related to the Indian intellectual and spiritual tradition. Although it is normally edited as an independent text, the Bhagavad Gita became a section of a massive Indian epic named “The Mahabharata,” the longest Indian epic. There is a part in the middle of this long text, consisting of 18 brief chapters and about 700 verses; this is the section known as the Bhagavad Gita. It is also referred to as the Gita, for short.

Authorship & Origin

The Bhagavad Gita was written down at some point between 400 BCE and 200 CE. Like the Vedas and the Upanishads, the authorship of the Bhagavad Gita is unclear. However, the credit for this text is traditionally given to a man named Vyasa, who is more of a legend than an actual historical figure; because of this, Vyasa has been compared to Homer, the great figure of ancient Greek epic poetry.

It has been suggested that the Bhagavad Gita was originally an

independent text except for the first chapter; the Bhagavad Gita does not develop the action of the Mahabharata. Furthermore, the Bhagavad Gita is at odds with the general style and content of the Mahabharata. Once the Gita is over, the narration of the Mahabharata resumes.

The Gita was written during a time of important social change in India, with kingdoms getting larger, increasing urbanization, more trade activity, and social conflict similar to what was happening when Jainism and Buddhism developed. This ancient Indian text is about the search for serenity, calmness, and permanence in a world of rapid change and how to integrate spiritual values into ordinary life.

Theme, Plot, & Setting

The Bhagavad Gita revolves around the following questions: How can someone live a spiritually meaningful life without withdrawing from society? What can someone who does not want to give up family and social obligations do to live the right way? The Gita challenges the general consensus that only ascetics and monks can live a perfect spiritual life through renunciation and emphasizes the value of an active spiritual life.

The plot of the Gita is based on two sets of cousins competing for the throne: The Pandavas and the Kauravas. Diplomacy has failed, so these two clans' armies meet on a battlefield in order to settle the conflict and decide which side will gain the throne. This is a major battle and it takes place in Kurukshetra, "the field of the Kurus," in the modern state of Haryana in India.

Arjuna, the great archer and leader of the Pandavas, is a member of the Kshatriyas caste (the warrior caste). He looks out toward his opponents and recognizes friends, relatives, former teachers, and finally reasons that controlling the kingdom is not worth the blood of all his loved ones. Emotionally overwhelmed, Arjuna drops

down, casts aside his bow and arrows, and decides to quit. He prefers to withdraw from battle; he prefers inaction instead of being responsible for the death of the people he loves. His chariot driver is the god Vishnu, who has taken the form of Krishna. Krishna sees Arjuna quitting and begins to persuade Arjuna that he should stick to his duty as a warrior and engage the enemy. The Bhagavad Gita is presented as a conversation between Arjuna and Krishna, a man and a god, a seeker and a knower. ⁽¹⁹⁾

The Message of the Bhagavad Gita

Arjuna is worried about entering the battle and destroying his own family, so Krishna begins by explaining five reasons why Arjuna should not be troubled by this. Essentially Krishna shows Arjuna why he will not get bad karma from taking part in the war.

- The first reason Krishna mentions is that because atman (the Self) is eternal; it is a mistake to think that one can actually kill someone. What actually happens is that people are sent to the next stage of reincarnation. “[Krishna speaking] One believes he is the slayer, another believes he is the slain. Both are ignorant; there is neither slayer nor slain. You were never born; you will never die. You have never changed; you can never change. Unborn, eternal, immutable, immemorial, you do not die when the body dies.” (Bhagavad Gita 2:19-20)
- Another reason why Arjuna should fight is because of honor and duty. (The root of the word Dharma, commonly translated as “duty”, derives from the Sanskrit root (dhr) – meaning “what holds things up or sustains. Dharma, here refers to the way in which aligning one’s decisions to dharma duty) hold together the proper order of things, and this is why Krishna—the sustainer, is the manifestation appearing now to Arjuna.) Arjuna is a member of the warrior class; the battle is the very reason

of his existence within this particular order now.

- The third reason Krishna gives is that inaction is impossible. Withdrawing from battle is in itself a conscious decision; not choosing is still a choice. This is, in a way, a criticism of some world-views, such as asceticism, which claim that leaving everything behind is inaction. Withdrawing from society is always a deliberate act.
- Another reason given by Krishna is that the source of evil is not in actions, but in passion and desires, the intentions behind the actions. This brings the dialogue to the last reason.
- The fifth and last reason is that there are ways to act where we can do what we have to do without getting bad karma.
- In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna explains three ways to act without getting bad karma.
- The first way is Jnana yoga (the way of knowledge). This idea is based on the Upanishads and holds that life and death are not real. Selfhood is nothing but an illusion. All we see are manifestations of the one. Once we realize that the one is behind all things, we can escape the bad karma from acting. “[Krishna speaking] I am ever present to those who have realized me in every creature. Seeing all life as my manifestation, they are never separated from me.” (Bhagavad Gita 6:30)
- The second way is Bhakti yoga (the way of devotion). This is an idea developed in great detail in Hinduism and holds that our actions can be dedicated to Krishna by surrendering our will to him, and he will take upon himself any bad karma.
- The third way is Karma yoga (“the way of action” or “the way of works”). The idea behind Karma yoga is acting without attachment; in other words, to act without being so concerned about the outcome of our actions. According to this view, if we act in such a way as not to get attached to the fruits of our actions, we can be more effective. Sometimes emotions like fear, embarrassment, or anxiety can interfere in the outcome of what we do.

“[Krishna speaking] Neither agitated by grief nor hankering after pleasure, have they lived free from lust and fear and anger? Established in meditation, they are truly wise. Fettered no more by selfish attachments, they are neither elated by good fortune nor depressed by bad. Such are the seers.” (Bhagavad Gita 2:56-57)

“[Krishna speaking] Thinking of objects, attachment to them is formed in a man. From attachment longing, and from longing anger grows. From anger comes delusion, and from delusion loss of memory. From loss of memory comes the ruin of understanding, and from the ruin of understanding he perishes.” (Bhagavad Gita 2:62-63)

Each of these three ways to act without getting bad karma is suitable for different people or castes. Priests would follow the way of knowledge; peasants, merchants, and commoners might be inclined to the way of devotion; warriors would identify themselves with the way of action.

Finally, Arjuna understands, after a philosophical revelation where he is able to apprehend the message that Krishna has been communicating to him through this lengthy dialogue on a battlefield before a cataclysmic war. And then Arjuna rises and acts. ⁽¹⁹⁾

15. Plato's World

The Last Days of Socrates — Plato's Greater, Better World

Socrates' execution at Athens in 399 BCE had a profound effect on his student Plato (428-348 BCE), who was inspired by his teacher to abandon his literary ambitions as playwright and devote himself to philosophy. Although Socrates is often referred to as 'the father of western philosophy,' this title is more correctly applied to Plato. Socrates himself wrote nothing, and almost everything that is known of the older philosopher comes from Plato's Dialogues. The vision Plato shared with the world was unlike any that came before. There is no way of knowing whether that vision actually belonged to Socrates. Contemporaries of Plato, such as the philosopher Phaedo (another of Socrates' students whom Plato named one of his most famous dialogues after), claimed that Plato's dialogues misrepresented Socrates.

Besides his work *Republic*, Plato is best known for the four dialogues commonly collected under the title *The Last Days of Socrates*, which include the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. These dialogues can be read as a four-act play in which Act I presents Socrates engaging in the kind of inquiry that resulted in the charges of his corrupting the youth of Athens and promoting a belief in other gods (the *Euthyphro*); Act II details his defense and conviction by the Athenian court (*Apology*); Act III presents his firm belief in his own vision while in prison (*Crito*); and Act IV is his final attempt to clarify his vision of the immortality of the soul and ultimate truth prior to his execution by drinking the cup of hemlock (*Phaedo*). In writing this drama, Plato created the paradigm of the visionary who dies for his beliefs that has been upheld by generations ever since as an example to be followed in standing

one's ground for truth and justice even when facing death for one's convictions. Central to the vision Plato attributes to Socrates is his famous Theory of Forms. ⁽²⁰⁾

Plato's Theory of Forms

The Theory of Forms, which Plato maintained and tried to prove in all his works, claims that there is a higher, invisible, realm above the world one sees and this realm is truer, better, and more beautiful than anything one sees on earth. In fact, all that one sees in one's life is only a reflection of what exists in the ideal realm of the Forms. When one claims that a vase, or anything else, is beautiful, one is recognizing in that object the ideal form of beauty in which that object participates. The ideal form of beauty can be approached by the people, animals, objects – anything – one sees or experiences and the more direct this participation, the more beautiful that person or object will appear. This same paradigm holds true for those concepts one claims are 'good' or 'true' – a claim or belief can only be true in so far as it participates in the ideal of Truth, and only be good as far as it approaches true Goodness. This theory would be applicable to concepts as lofty as God's existence or as commonplace as the appreciation of a meal; one's dinner would not taste good simply because it suited one's individual palate but because the preparation of the food that meal consists of participates more fully in the realm of Forms than other food.

Through his four-act drama 'The Last Days of Socrates,' Plato provides a role model in Socrates for others to emulate and this drama relies completely on one's acceptance of the Theory of Forms, a world of ideal, objective truth.

Plato rejected completely the relativist claim, promoted by Protagoras (c.485-415 BCE), that "of all things a man is the measure," best expressed in the phrase that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The notion that all things are relative to individual

perception and experience is antithetical to Plato's vision. One cannot simply believe or do as one wishes and maintain that this is the right way to live; one should instead work. ⁽²⁰⁾

The Euthyphro

The dialogue of the Euthyphro opens the play and presents Socrates before he enters the court to defend himself against the capital charge of impiety. His chief accuser was a poet named Meletus, a young man about whom nothing is known outside of his association with Socrates' trial, and two others, Anytus and Lycon, all prominent citizens of Athens. As the dialogue begins, Socrates meets the much younger man, Euthyphro, who is there to prosecute his father on the same charge. Plato fashions Euthyphro's situation as a dramatic mirror to Socrates' own: a younger man who knows little or nothing of what he's alleging bringing a serious charge against an older man. Throughout the dialogue it becomes increasingly clear that Euthyphro is a foolish and pretentious child claiming a superior knowledge of the gods and their will, which he cannot demonstrate. Socrates' persistence in trying to get Euthyphro to realize he is claiming knowledge he does not have, and to try to face this truth and re-evaluate his life, is intended as an example of how Socrates 'corrupted' the youth of Athens. By confronting people with their pretention and false self-images, Socrates encouraged them to question everything they had been taught or thought they knew and this did not sit well with the authorities in Athens.

This is not to say that 'corrupting the youth' was the reason Socrates was executed; there were many more factors operating in Athens to condemn him. Plato knew this, of course, and uses the Euthyphro to demonstrate how absurd the charge was while also pointedly dramatizing how someone could interpret Socrates' efforts as disruptive and destructive. Euthyphro, after all, is just a

very silly young man who, by his own admission in the dialogue, is never taken seriously by anyone. ⁽²⁰⁾

The Apology

The Apology continues the drama as Socrates stands trial before the men of Athens. The title has nothing to do with Socrates accepting responsibility for a wrong done and asking forgiveness. 'Apology' means a defense of a position and, in the course of this dialogue, Socrates defends his actions and his beliefs in one of the finest speeches in history:

"Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you and, while I have life and strength, I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet after my manner, and convincing him saying: O my friend, why do you who are a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens care so much about laying up the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation and so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all? Are you not Ashamed of this? And if the person with whom I am arguing says: Yes, but I do care; I do not depart or let him go at once; I interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no virtue, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less. And this I should say to everyone whom I meet, young and old, citizen and alien, but especially to the citizens, inasmuch as they are my brethren. For this is the command of God, as I would have you know: and I believe that to this day no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God. For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and

young alike, not to take thought for your persons and your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue come money and every other good of man, public as well as private. This is my teaching, and if this is the doctrine, which corrupts the youth, my influence is ruinous indeed. But if anyone says that this is not my teaching, he is speaking an untruth. Wherefore, O men of Athens, I say to you, do as Anytus bids or not as Anytus bids, and either acquit me or not; but whatever you do, know that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times.” (29d-30c)

Although Socrates defends himself ably, he is convicted of impiety and sentenced to death. Still standing firm in his beliefs he defies his accusers and the members of the jury telling them how “an unexamined life is not worth living” and how he has no regrets, knowing that he has done the will of God and pursued truth to the end. ⁽²⁰⁾

The Crito

In the Crito, Socrates’ old friend Crito comes to visit him in prison and tries to convince him to escape. It was common practice in ancient Athens for prisoners who had wealthy and connected friends to bribe the guards and slip out of jail to some far off Greek colony or another country. Socrates refuses, however, claiming that the laws of Athens have formed him and made him who he is and he cannot choose to ignore them now just because they do not suit him. Plato describes a dialogue between Socrates and the Laws of Athens in which the laws remind him of all the good they have provided him personally and the people of the city generally. Socrates tells Crito that, if he were to escape, he would betray the

laws, which have given him all that he has profited from in life. He would also be betraying himself by running from the sentence imposed on him since he would not be taken seriously anywhere else in the world if he backed down from his teachings by showing that he did not think them worth dying for. The dialogue ends with Crito accepting Socrates' arguments and abandoning his plans for rescuing his friend.

“[One] must face death hopefully, and believe this one truth, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.” (41d) ⁽²⁰⁾

The Phaedo

The Phaedo, the most philosophically complex of the dialogues, is the last act of the drama. Socrates' students have gathered at the prison to talk with their master before his execution. Two friends of his, Simmias and Cebes, both Pythagorean philosophers from Thebes, are the chief interlocutors in the dialogue, which argues for the immortality of the soul and life after death. Socrates begins the discussion stating, “I am confident that the dead have some kind of existence” (63C) and Simmias and Cebes then propose arguments against this claim in order to test the truth of it. In the Apology, Socrates tells the men of the court that “the state of death is one of two things: either the dead man wholly ceases to be and loses all consciousness or, as we are told, it is a change and a migration of the soul to another place” (40c), but later in the dialogue firmly claims that the individual survives bodily death, stating one “must face death hopefully, and believe this one truth, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death” (41d) and concludes by telling them, “now the time has come and we must go away – I to die, and you to live. Which is better is known to God alone” (42a). The Phaedo develops these ideas more completely as Simmias and

Cebes argue against the immortality of the soul and Socrates refutes their arguments. He uses the Theory of Recollection, which is most clearly developed in another dialogue, the *Meno*, that argues that what we call 'learning' is actually an act of remembering experiences from a former life and, as in that dialogue, tries to prove this by showing how people know things which they were never taught. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates claims:

"Now if we received this knowledge before our birth, and were born with it, we knew, both before and at the moment of our birth, not only the equal, and the greater, and the less, [regarding abstract equality] but also everything of the same kind, did we not? Our present reasoning does not refer only to equality. It refers just as much to absolute good, and absolute beauty, and absolute justice, and absolute holiness; in short, I repeat, to everything which we mark with the name of real, in the questions and answers of our dialectic. So we must have received our knowledge of all realities before we were born." (75c-d)

What he is arguing for here is acceptance of the Theory of Forms in that what we 'recollect' is available to us because of the existence of another realm of reality in which we took part prior to birth, a realm in which we were aware of objective, final truths. In *Meno* he argues that, if we die with our mental faculties intact, we will better remember what we experienced in our past life and that the realm of Forms will be a part of that experience; in *Phaedo* he is expanding on that claim.

The arguments are raised and refuted, but Simmias and Cebes still press for hard evidence of the immortality of the soul and Cebes claims he does not seem to understand Socrates' argument clearly. At this point Socrates launches into his final proof of the immortality of the soul beginning by saying:

"I mean nothing new, only what I have repeated over and over again, both in our conversation today and at other

times. I am going to try to explain to you the kind of cause at which I have worked, and I will go back to what we have so often spoken of, and begin with the assumption that there exists an absolute beauty, and an absolute good, and an absolute greatness, and so on. If you grant me this, and agree that they exist, I hope to be able to show you what my cause is, and to discover that the soul is immortal.” (100b)

It is at this point that Socrates’ argument falters at two points: 1. that he will “begin with the assumption that there exists” this realm of Forms, and 2. saying to his friends, “if you grant me this, and agree that they exist...” In order for the realm of Forms to act as evidence in support of the immortality of the soul, one must accept that such a realm exists without evidence. If one does, then one believes; if one does not, then one will always doubt. In the end, there is no hard evidence to prove the immortality of the soul; there is only faith. ⁽²⁰⁾

Plato’s Greater, Better World?

Plato worked his whole life to rationally prove, without a doubt, the existence of a higher plane of existence and higher truths, which informed the visible world. In the last dialogue he would write, *Laws*, he was still trying and still not quite succeeding. Plato’s works may be read as one life-long refutation of Protagoras’ relativity and the older philosopher’s belief that one may live and believe however one chooses. Even though he was never able to prove his objective standards to his own – or other’s – satisfaction, his attempt created a concept which had never been articulated before in such a highly developed form: that there is a higher good to strive for in life, an objective truth one should seek, and a right way of living one’s life according to the standards of that truth. In his drama of the last days of Socrates’ life, Plato provided the world with the

ultimate role model of the philosopher who lives his belief in these higher truths, and in the unseen realm from which they originate, and gives his life for that belief. Even if one does not accept the universe Plato articulated, one cannot help but admire his vision of a greater, better world that one draws closer to simply by believing it exists. ⁽²⁰⁾

16. Buddha

Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama (also known as the Buddha “the awakened one”) was the leader and founder of a sect of wanderer ascetics (Sramanas), one of many sects which existed at that time all over India. This sect came to be known as Sangha, to distinguish it from other similar communities. The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama are considered the core of Buddhism.²¹

Based on all the information available, it does not seem to be possible to date the life of the Buddha in an exact and reliable way. What seems to be certain is that the Buddha died approximately at the age of eighty sometime between 410 and 370 BCE. Any date between these two means that the Buddha passed away about 140-100 years before the reign of Emperor Asoka.²²

After his death, the community he founded slowly evolved into a religious-like movement that was finally established as a state religion in India by the time of Emperor Ashoka, during the 3rd century BCE.

Siddhartha is a Sanskrit personal name which means “He Who Achieves His Goal.” The Sanskrit family name Gautama means “descendants of Gotama.” Gotama is the name of several figures in ancient India, including a poet of the Rig Veda and also Aksapada Gautama (or Gotama), a famous Indian logician. Pali literature normally refers to Siddhartha Gautama as Gotama Buddha.

Traditionally, the meaning of the term Buddha is understood as a person who has awakened from the deep sleep of ignorance. In Indian tradition, the expression was already used before, during, and after the life of Siddhartha by many religious communities, but it became most strongly linked to the Buddhist tradition.⁽²¹⁾

Historical Context

At the time when Siddhartha Gautama lived, Northern India was composed of numerous and small independent states competing for resources. This was a time when the traditional religious order in India was being challenged by a number of new philosophical and religious schools that were not in line with the orthodox Indian religious views. The Vedic philosophy, theology and metaphysics, along with its ever-growing complexity of rituals and sacrificial fees, was being questioned. Materialistic schools were rampant, undermining the reputation and authority of the priestly class, leading to a temporary religious anarchy, which contributed to the development of new religions. By the time Siddhartha Gautama was born, the intellectual decay of the old Brahmanic orthodoxy had begotten a strong skepticism and moral vacuum that was filled by new religious and philosophical views.

The realization that he, like anyone else, could be subject to different forms of human suffering drove Siddhartha into a personal crisis. By the time he was 29, he abandoned his home and began to live as a homeless ascetic.

After leaving Kapilavastu, Siddhartha practiced the yoga discipline under the direction of two of the leading masters of that time: Arada Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra.

Siddhartha did not get the results he expected, so he left the masters, engaged in extreme asceticism, and he was joined by five followers. For a period of six years, Siddhartha tried to attain his goal but was unsuccessful. After realizing that asceticism was not the way to attain the results he was looking for, he gave up this way of life.

Then, after eating a meal and taking a bath, Siddhartha sat down under a tree of the species *ficus religiosa*, where he finally attained Nirvana (perfect enlightenment) and became known as the Buddha. Soon after this, the Buddha delivered his first sermon in a place named Sarnath, also known as the deer park, near the city of

Varanasi. This was a key moment in the Buddhist tradition, traditionally known as the moment when the Buddha “set in motion the wheel of the law.”

The Buddha explained the middle way between asceticism and a life of luxury, the four noble truths (suffering, its origin, how to end it, and the eightfold path or the path leading to the extinction of suffering), and the impersonality of all beings. ⁽²¹⁾

Key Buddhist Concepts

The Buddha was not concerned with satisfying human curiosity related to metaphysical speculations. Topics like the existence of god, the afterlife, or creation stories were ignored by him. During the centuries, Buddhism has evolved into different branches, and many of them have incorporated a number of diverse metaphysical systems, deities, astrology and other elements that the Buddha did not consider. In spite of this diversity, though, Buddhism has a relative unity and stability in its moral code.

The most important teaching of the Buddha is known as “**The Four Noble Truths**,” which is shared with varying adjustments by all Buddhist schools. ⁽²³⁾ It all begins with the realization of human suffering. ⁽¹⁾

But Buddhism differs in its understanding of suffering from other philosophical and spiritual traditions. For example, in some religions, sin is the origin of human suffering. In Buddhism there is no sin; the root cause of human suffering is *avidyā* “ignorance.”

In general, the Four Noble Truths are explained as follows:

1. The First Noble Truth is generally translated as “**There is suffering**.” This can be easily understood when it comes to painful situations like death, illness, abuse, poverty, and so forth. But suffering also may arise from good things because nothing is permanent, everything is changing, and whatever

gives us happiness will sooner or later come to an end. It seems that all pleasures are temporary and the more we enjoy them, the more we will miss them when they end. “Nothing lasts forever” is one of the insights of the Buddha.

2. **The origin of suffering** is the second noble truth. ⁽¹⁾ This origin of suffering is desire. Suffering comes from desire, also referred to as “thirst” or greed. Our desires will always exceed our resources and leave us unhappy and unsatisfied. All suffering originates in desire, but not all desire generates suffering. Only selfish desire generates suffering; it is directed to the advantage of the part rather than to the good of the whole.
3. **The cessation of suffering** is the third noble truth. ⁽¹⁾ By stopping desire, suffering also stops. The idea is not to get too attached to the desire for material goods, places, ideas, or even people. Non-attachment to anything is the main idea behind the third noble truth. It means that since all changes in our attachment is too strong, we will inevitably suffer at some point. After all, we will all get old, decay, and die; this is a natural cycle, and there is nothing wrong with it. The problem comes when, by attaching too much, we do not accept the changes.
4. **The path to cessation of suffering** is the fourth Noble Truth. The Way, “The Eightfold Path” to the cessation of suffering, is comprised of: right views, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. ⁽²³⁾

Nirvana

Nirvana is a Sanskrit noun often translated as “extinction,” which signifies the act and effect of blowing at something, to put it out: to blow out or to extinguish. The process itself, along with its outcome,

are also part of the meaning of nirvana: becoming extinguished, blowing out, and calming down. The religious use of the word nirvana seems to be earlier than Buddhism itself and may have been introduced into Buddhism along with many other religious elements associated with the Sramanas movements. The concept of nirvana is also present in Jainism and in different Hindu sects; its precise meaning varies, but it revolves around the idea of a state of bliss and liberation from individuality and the suffering of the cycle of birth and death.

The turning point in Siddhartha's life was attaining nirvana. What is the meaning of nirvana here? What does it mean that Siddhartha Gautama achieved enlightenment, thus becoming the Buddha (awakened)? The precise nature of the Buddhahood is debated by various schools. Despite the fact that "nirvana" is a very popular expression in Buddhism, Buddhists have never reached full agreement on its meaning.

In Buddhism, the concept of nirvana was taken in different directions according to the different schools. The main reason for these differences has to do with the fact that early Buddhist texts do not provide a clear systematic scholarly definition of nirvana, but rather they express its meaning using metaphors and other ambiguous means. A famous example can be found in the Pali Canon where nirvana is interpreted "as when a flame is blown out by the wind." Here, the metaphor refers to the extinction of the "three poisons" (or primary afflictions): greed/sensuality, hatred/aversion, and delusion/ignorance. After this, one is no longer subject to the cycle of death and rebirth.

A more naturalistic view suggests that nirvana is the culmination of a long process of personal discipline and self-cultivation. Living an "enlightened" life, in touch with the way things truly are, free of delusion, greed and hatred, ultimately gives rise to nirvana, a state of human excellence. ⁽²¹⁾

The Middle Path: Neither Affirmation nor

Denial of Theistic Models on Philosophical Grounds

The idea that there are no gods and that the material world is all there is was already held by some materialistic schools in India, particularly by the Charvaka school, so in this sense it might not seem an original insight. But the approach of these schools was largely atheist since they all denied the existence of supernatural entities. Both the theistic approach of the Vedic religion and the atheistic approach of the materialistic schools rest ultimately on the same conviction: both hold that we can know whether or not the gods actually exist; one is certain of their existence, the other is certain they do not exist. The Buddha claimed the impossibility of human knowledge of arriving to definite answers regarding this matter, so his view was an agnostic one, suspending judgement and saying that no sufficient grounds exist either for affirmation or for denial. This idea is so strong in Buddhism that even today in some of the Buddhist branches who have incorporated supernatural entities into their traditions, the role of human choice and responsibility remains supreme, far above the deeds of the supernatural. ⁽²¹⁾

The Legacy of the Buddha

It would be historically incorrect to say that Siddhartha Gautama saw himself as a religious leader or that he consciously set out to start a new religious movement. He considered himself a teacher who rejected the ways of traditional Hindu religious orthodoxy and offered his followers a different path. He considered the many Vedic rites and ceremonies to be pointless and abusive and he was also against the caste system, stressing the equality among all people.

Siddhartha's ideas have some similarities with the work of Kapila, an Indian sage who lived probably about two centuries earlier. Both

were concerned with providing humanity with a relief from suffering. They discarded the remedies proposed by the Vedic rites, especially the sacrifices; they considered these rites to be cruel because of their strong connection with the slaughter of living beings. Both of them believed that knowledge and meditation were the true means of salvation. Also, they both strived to attain a state of human perfection and their approach was purely agnostic. However, the parallels go no further. Kapila organized his views in a system of philosophy that has not a hint of sympathy for mankind in general. The Buddha, on the other hand, delivered his message with a living, all-embracing sympathy and a deep concern for the poor and the oppressed. He preached in favor of the equality of men (which was largely forgotten in the Indian society during his time) and opposed inequalities and abuses of the caste system.

The meaning of these teachings and message of the Buddha is also a controversial topic. Some Buddhist schools say that its core is non-violence, others say compassion, and some others say it is freedom from rebirth. There are also scholars who claim that the Buddha was looking to restore the pre-Vedic Indian religion, which was buried under centuries of distortion and dead ceremonials. Some of these ideas, whether the true core of the message of the Buddha or not, are not original to Buddhism. Non-violence and compassion was one of the pillars of Jainism long after the times of the Buddha, while freedom from rebirth is presented in the Upanishads, also before the time of the Buddha.

The one aspect of the message of the Buddha that seems original is humanism: the insight that human beings are ultimately responsible for their fate and that no supernatural forces, no magic rituals, and no gods can be held accountable for our actions.

The Buddha, originally considered a human being (wise and extraordinary, but only a man), gradually entered into the pantheon of the Hindu gods and came to be regarded as one of the many manifestations of the god Vishnu. A man of tolerance, intelligence, compassion, peace; what harm could it do to worship him as a deity? His followers perhaps thought that by making him a god, the Buddha

would become more special, his image more powerful and unique. However, in a tradition like in India, filled with endless gods and goddesses everywhere, to make him a god was also to make him ordinary, just one more god among thousands. Moreover, his image became to coexist with myth, ritual and superstition that corrupted his original message. Eventually, the Buddha was swallowed up by the realm of Hindu gods, his importance diminished and Buddhism finally died out in the land where it was born.

So complete was the destruction of Buddhism in India during ancient times, that when western scholars rediscovered Buddhism, the records they relied on came from countries near and around India: no valuable records were kept in the home of Buddhism. The message of the Buddha vanished from its homeland, but it remained alive in almost every other part of Asia, and from Asia it spread to the rest of the world. ⁽²¹⁾

PART V

MODULE 4: EXPLORING EPISTEMOLOGY

17. Introduction

Exploring Epistemology

Module Introduction

Topics

- What is knowledge? Can we know? How *can* we know?
- How *do* we know? How *do* we know we know?
- What is it that knows? **What am I?**
- What is Knowledge? How do we know? How do we know we know? Does Science Tell us the Whole Truth?

As you may recall from earlier modules, epistemology is the field of Philosophy that deals with knowledge and the distinction between knowledge and opinion. Although this definition seems clear enough, when we begin digging deeper, as we will in this module, we discover that people don't actually agree at all about what knowledge is or how to acquire it.

The first section of this module will outline several answers to the questions regarding knowledge and how we come to know. In the second section, we will explore a specific aspect of epistemology within the branch of philosophy known as the philosophy of science.⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize the relationships between cultural expressions and their contexts.
2. Recognize concepts in metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology and the context of their development.
3. Comprehend the scope of philosophic inquiry and how beliefs are formed and justified especially within a particular cultural construct.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module the student will be able to:

1. Explain the differences between rationalism and empiricism.
2. Define Sufi mysticism and Skepticism.
3. Define and explain elements, models, and methods that comprise aspects of the philosophy of science, including science vs. scientism; normal vs. revolutionary science; and Kuhn's definition of paradigm. ⁽¹⁾

Readings and Resources

- [Ship of Theseus](#) from Wikipedia
- [Meditations on First Philosophy/Meditation I](#) from Wikisource
- [Meditations on First Philosophy/Meditation II](#) from Wikisource
- [The Confessions of al-Ghazali](#) by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, translated by Claud Field

Supplemental Materials

(Note: These materials are considered supplemental and thus are not used for assessment purposes)

Note: These materials, in the media form of online resources and videos, are considered supplemental and thus are not used for assessment purposes.

- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) website
- [Descartes' Epistemology](#) from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy website
- [The Structure of Scientific Revolutions Reviewed in 8.5 minutes](#) by The TAWOP Channel
- [Philosophy – Epistemology: Science: Can it Teach us Everything?](#) by Wireless Philosophy
- [Rationalism Vs Empiricism](#) by Element 99
- [Aquinas and the Cosmological arguments: Crash Course Philosophy # 10](#) by CrashCourse
- [Leonardo DiCaprio & The Nature of Reality: Crash Course Philosophy # 4](#) by CrashCourse
- [Cartesian Skepticism – Neo, Meet Rene: Crash Course Philosophy #5](#) by CrashCourse
- [Locke, Berkeley, & Empiricism: Crash Course Philosophy # 6](#) by CrashCourse

Assignments & Learning Activities

- Review Introduction
- Review Readings and Resources
- Review Learning Unit
- Participate in Module 4 Discussion

18. Epistemology

Aspects of Epistemology

Once, Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering about, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know that he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuang Zhou. But he didn't know if he was Zhuang Zhou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things. ⁽²⁴⁾

Introduction

What is knowledge? How do we know? How do we know we know? What knowledge is scientific? Is this the only knowledge that is truth?

As you may recall from earlier modules, epistemology is the field of philosophy that deals with knowledge and the distinction between knowledge and opinion. Although this definition seems clear enough, when we begin digging deeper, as we will in this module, we discover that people do not actually agree at all about what knowledge is or how to acquire it.

The first section of this module will outline several answers to the questions regarding knowledge and how we come to know.

In the second section, we will explore a specific aspect of epistemology within the branch of philosophy known as the philosophy of science. ⁽¹⁾

How Do We know? Modern Philosophy

Rationalism and Empiricism

In Modern Philosophy, the foundational methods and formulations advanced to address issues in epistemology are **rationalism** and **empiricism**.

Rationalism is the epistemological theory that significant knowledge of the world can best be achieved by *a priori* means and that reason (Lat. *Ratio*) is the only reliable source of human knowledge.

Empiricism is the epistemological theory that genuine information about the world must be acquired by *a posteriori* means, so that nothing can be thought without first being sensed. Reliance on experience is the source of ideas and knowledge. ^(25/26)

The rationalists are represented by such philosophers as:

- René Descartes (French, 1596–1650)
- Benedictus de Spinoza (Dutch, 1632–1677)
- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (German, 1646–1716)

The empiricists are represented by such philosophers as:

- John Locke (British, 1632–1704)
- George Berkeley (Irish, 1685–1753)
- David Hume (Scottish, 1711–1776)

You can learn more about these ideas from [Assembled Western philosophers](#). ^(1/27)

19. Skepticism

Knowledge: Is it Possible?

Skepticism in Epistemology

Skepticism is the belief that some or all human knowledge is impossible. Since even our best methods for learning about the world sometimes fall short of perfect certainty, skeptics argue, it is better to suspend belief than to rely on the dubitable products of reason. ⁽²⁸⁾

Review [Philosophical skepticism](#) from Wikipedia. ⁽²⁹⁾

Descartes and Methodical Skepticism

The first great philosopher of the modern era was René Descartes, whose new approach won him recognition by some as the progenitor of modern philosophy. Descartes's pursuit of mathematical and scientific truth soon led to a profound rejection of the scholastic tradition in which he had been educated. Much of his work was concerned with the provision of a secure foundation for the advancement of human knowledge through the natural sciences. Fearing the condemnation of the church, however, Descartes was rightly cautious about publicly expressing the full measure of his radical views. The philosophical writings for which he is remembered are therefore extremely circumspect in their treatment of controversial issues.

After years of work in private, Descartes finally published a preliminary statement of his views in the *Discourse on the Method*

of Rightly Conducting the Reason (1637). Since mathematics had genuinely achieved the certainty for which human thinkers yearn, he argued, we rightly turn to mathematical reasoning as a model for progress in human knowledge more generally. Expressing perfect confidence in the capacity of human reason to achieve knowledge, Descartes proposed an intellectual process no less unsettling than the architectural destruction and rebuilding of an entire town. **In order to be absolutely sure that we accept only what is genuinely certain, we must first deliberately renounce all of the firmly held but questionable beliefs we have previously acquired by experience and education .**⁽³⁰⁾

The progress and certainty of mathematical knowledge, Descartes supposed, provided an emulable model for a similarly productive philosophical method, characterized by **four simple rules** :

1. Accept as true only what is indubitable.
2. Divide every question into manageable parts.
3. Begin with the simplest issues and ascend to the more complex.
4. Review frequently enough to retain the whole argument at once.

This quasi-mathematical procedure for the achievement of knowledge is typical of a rationalistic approach to epistemology.

In this context, Descartes offered a brief description of his own experience with the proper approach to knowledge. **Begin by renouncing any belief that can be doubted, including especially the testimony of the senses; then use the perfect certainty of one's own existence, which survives this doubt, as the foundation for a demonstration of the providential reliability of one's faculties generally.** Significant knowledge of the world, Descartes supposed, can be achieved only by following this epistemological method, the rationalism of relying on a mathematical model and eliminating

the distraction of sensory information in order to pursue the demonstrations of pure reason.

Later sections of the Discourse (along with the supplementary scientific essays with which it was published) trace some of the more significant consequences of following the Cartesian method in philosophy. Descartes's mechanistic inclinations emerge clearly in these sections, with frequent reminders of the success of physical explanations of complex phenomena. Non-human animals, in Descartes's view, are complex organic machines, all of whose actions can be fully explained without any reference to the operation of mind in thinking. In fact, Descartes declared that most of human behavior, like that of animals, is susceptible to simple mechanistic explanation. Cleverly designed automata could successfully mimic nearly all of what we do. Thus, **Descartes argued, it is only the general ability to adapt to widely varying circumstances—and, in particular, the capacity to respond creatively in the use of language—that provides a sure test for the presence of an immaterial soul associated with the normal human body.**

But Descartes supposed that **no matter how human-like an animal or machine could be made to appear** in its form or operations, it would always be possible to **distinguish it from a real human being by two functional criteria**. Although an animal or machine may be capable of performing any one activity as well as (or even better than) we can, he argued, **each human being is capable of a greater variety of different activities than could be performed by anything lacking a soul**. In a special instance of this general point, **Descartes held that** although an animal or machine might be made to utter sounds resembling human speech in response to specific stimuli, **only an immaterial thinking substance could engage in the creative use of language required for responding appropriately to any unexpected circumstances**. My puppy is a loyal companion, and my computer is a powerful instrument, but neither of them can engage in a decent conversation.⁽³⁰⁾

Please read the following passages from Descartes from the

Meditations on First Philosophy: Meditations 1 and II. Focus on the big ideas written by Descartes. The passages are available here: ⁽¹⁾

- [Meditations on First Philosophy/Meditation I](#) (Med. I) from Wikisource ⁽³¹⁾
- [Meditations on First Philosophy/Meditation II](#) (Med. II) from Wikisource ⁽³²⁾

20. Descartes

The Meditations of Descartes

Proof of the existence of god and the immortality of the human soul was an explicit concern for religious matters and did not reflect any loss of interest in pursuing the goals of science. By sharply distinguishing mind from body, Descartes hoped to preserve a distinct arena for the church while securing the freedom of scientists to develop mechanistic accounts of physical phenomena. In this way, he supposed it possible to satisfy the requirements of Christian doctrine, but discouraged the interference of the church in scientific matters and promoted further observational exploration of the material world. The arrangement of the Meditations, Descartes emphasized, was not the order of reasons; that is, it made no effort to proceed from the metaphysical foundations of reality to the dependent existence of lesser beings, as Spinoza would later try to do. Instead, this book followed the order of thoughts; that is, it **traced the epistemological progress an individual thinker might follow in establishing knowledge at a level of perfect certainty. Thus, these are truly Meditations; we are meant to put ourselves in the place of the first-person narrator, experiencing for ourselves the benefits of the philosophical method.** ⁽³³⁾

Descartes: Starting with Doubt

The Method of Doubt

The basic strategy of Descartes's method of doubt is to defeat skepticism on its own ground. Begin by doubting the truth of everything—not only the evidence of the senses and the more extravagant cultural presuppositions, but even the fundamental process of reasoning itself. If any particular truth about the world can survive this extreme skeptical challenge, then it must be truly indubitable and therefore a perfectly certain foundation for knowledge. **The First Meditation, then, is an extended exercise in learning to doubt everything that I believe, considered at three distinct levels:**

1. Perceptual Illusion

First, Descartes noted that the testimony of the senses with respect to any particular judgment about the external world may turn out to be mistaken. (Med. I) Things are not always just as they seem at first glance (or at first hearing, etc.) to be. But then, Descartes argued, it is prudent never wholly to trust in the truth of what we perceive. In ordinary life, of course, we adjust for mistaken perceptions by reference to correct perceptions. **But since we cannot be sure at first which cases are veridical and which are not, it is possible (if not always feasible) to doubt any particular bit of apparent sensory knowledge.**

2. The Dream Problem

Second, Descartes raised a more systematic method for doubting the legitimacy of all sensory perception. Since my most vivid dreams are internally indistinguishable from waking experience, he argued, it is possible that everything I now “perceive” to be part of the physical world outside me is in fact nothing more than a fanciful fabrication of my own imagination. **On this supposition, it is possible to doubt that any physical thing really exists, that there is an external world at all. (Med. I)**

Severe as it is, this level of doubt is not utterly comprehensive, since the truths of mathematics and the content of simple natures remain unaffected. Even if there is no material world (and thus, even in my dreams) two plus three makes five and red looks red to me. In order to doubt the veracity of such fundamental beliefs, I must extend the method of doubting even more hyperbolically.

3. A Deceiving God

Finally, then, Descartes raised even more comprehensive doubts by inviting us to consider a radical hypothesis derived from one of our most treasured traditional beliefs. What if there is an omnipotent god, but that deity devotes its full attention to deceiving me? (Med. I) The problem here is not merely that I might be forced by god to believe something that is in fact false; Descartes meant to raise the far more devastating possibility that whenever I believe anything, even if it has always been true up until now, a truly omnipotent deceiver could at that very moment choose to change the world so as to render my belief false. **On this supposition, it seems possible to doubt the truth of absolutely anything I might come to believe.**

Although the hypothesis of a deceiving god best serves the logical structure of the Meditations as a whole, Descartes offered two

alternative versions of the hypothetical doubt for the benefit of those who might take offense at even a counter-factual suggestion of impiety. It may seem more palatable to the devout to consider the possibility that I systematically deceive myself or that there is some evil demon who perpetually tortures me with my own error. The point in each case is that it is possible for every belief I entertain to be false.

Remember that the point of the entire exercise is to out-do the skeptics at their own game, to raise the broadest possible grounds for doubt, so that whatever we come to believe in the face of such challenges will indeed be that which cannot be doubted. It is worthwhile to pause here, wallowing in the depths of Cartesian doubt at the end of the First Meditation, the better to appreciate the escape he offers at the outset of Meditation Two. ⁽³³⁾

Descartes: Starting with Doubt — I Am, I Exist

The Second Meditation begins with a review of the First. Remember that I am committed to suspending judgment with respect to anything about which I can conceive any doubt, and my doubts are extensive. I mistrust every report of my senses, I regard the material world as nothing more than a dream, and I suppose that an omnipotent god renders false each proposition that I am even inclined to believe. Since everything therefore seems to be dubitable, **does it follow that I can be certain of nothing at all? It does not.** Descartes claimed that one thing emerges as true even under the strict conditions imposed by the otherwise universal doubt: “I am, I exist” is necessarily true whenever the thought occurs to me. (Med. II) This truth neither derives from sensory information nor depends upon the reality of an external world, and I would have to exist even if I were systematically deceived. For even an omnipotent god could not cause it to be true, at one

and the same time, both that I am deceived and that I do not exist. If I am deceived, then at least I am.

Although Descartes's reasoning here is best known in the Latin translation of its expression in the Discourse, "cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"), it is not merely an inference from the activity of thinking to the existence of an agent that performs that activity. It is intended rather as an intuition of one's own reality, an expression of the indubitability of first-person experience, the logical self-certification of self-conscious awareness in any form.

Skepticism is thereby defeated, according to Descartes. No matter how many skeptical challenges are raised—indeed, even if things are much worse than the most extravagant skeptic ever claimed—there is at least one fragment of genuine human knowledge: my perfect certainty of my own existence. From this starting-point, Descartes supposed, it is possible to achieve indubitable knowledge of many other propositions as well. ⁽³³⁾

Starting with Doubt — I Am a Thinking Thing

An initial consequence may be drawn directly from the intuitive certainty of the cogito itself. If I know that I am, Descartes argued, I must also know what I am; an understanding of my true nature must be contained implicitly in the content of my awareness. What, then, is this "I" that doubts, that may be deceived, that **thinks**? Since I became certain of my existence while entertaining serious doubts about sensory information and the existence of a material world, none of the apparent features of my human body can have been crucial for my understanding of myself. **But all that is left is my thought itself, so Descartes concluded that "sum res cogitans" ("I am a thing that thinks").** (Med. II) In Descartes's terms, I am a substance whose inseparable attribute (or entire essence) is thought, with all its modes: doubting, willing, conceiving, believing, etc. What I really am is a mind [Lat. *mens*] or

soul [Lat. anima]. So completely am I identified with my conscious awareness, Descartes claimed, that if I were to stop thinking altogether, it would follow that I no longer existed at all. At this point, nothing else about human nature can be determined with such perfect certainty.

In ordinary life, my experience of bodies may appear to be more vivid than self-consciousness, but Descartes argued that sensory appearances actually provide no reliable knowledge of the external world. **If I hold a piece of beeswax while approaching the fire, all of the qualities it presents to my senses change dramatically while the wax itself remains. (Med. II) It follows that the impressions of sense are unreliable guides even to the nature of bodies.** ⁽³³⁾

21. Locke

Empiricism

We now leave the Continent for an extended look at philosophy in Great Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here the favored model for achieving human knowledge was not the abstract mathematical reasoning so admired by the rationalists, but the more concrete observations of natural science. Heeding the call of Francis Bacon, British scientists had pursued a vigorous program of observation and experiment with great success. Isaac Newton showed that both celestial and terrestrial motion could be explained by reference to a simple set of laws of motion and gravitation; Robert Boyle investigated the behavior of gasses and proposed a general theory of matter as a collection of corpuscles; and Thomas Sydenham began to use observational methods for the diagnosis and treatment of disease.

Philosopher John Locke greatly admired the achievements that these scientists (his friends in the Royal Society) had made in physics, chemistry, and medicine, and he sought to clear the ground for future developments by providing a theory of knowledge compatible with such carefully-conducted study of nature.⁽³⁴⁾

Focusing on the Big Ideas in Locke

The goal of Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) is to establish epistemological foundations for the new science by examining the reliability, scope, and limitations of human knowledge in contrast with the pretensions of uncritical belief, borrowed opinion, and mere superstition. Since the sciences

had already demonstrated their practical success, Locke tried to apply their Baconian methods to the pursuit of his own philosophical aims. In order to discover how the human understanding achieves knowledge, we must trace that knowledge to its origins in our experience.

Locke's investigation into human knowledge began by asking how we acquire the basic materials out of which that knowledge is composed, our **ideas**. Ideas, then, are the immediate objects of all thought, the meaning or signification of all words, and the mental representatives of all things. Locke's question was, where do we get all of these ideas which are the content of our knowledge? ⁽³⁴⁾

Focusing on the Big Ideas in Locke — Ideas from Experience

First, Locke eliminated one bad answer to the question. Most of Book I of the *Essay* is devoted to a detailed refutation of the belief that any of our knowledge is innate, Locke argued, since children and the mentally defective do not assent to them. Moreover, even if everyone did accept these principles, their universality could be better explained in terms of self-evidence or shared experience than by reference to a presumed innate origin. (*Essay* I ii 3-5) Innatism is the refuge of lazy intellectual dictators who wish thereby to impose their provincial notions upon others. Besides, Locke held, our knowledge cannot be innate because none of the ideas of which it is composed are innate.

As the correct answer to the question, Locke proposed the fundamental principle of empiricism: all of our knowledge and ideas arise from experience. (*Essay* II i 2) The initially empty room of the mind is furnished with ideas of two sorts: first, by **sensation** we obtain ideas of things we suppose to exist outside us in the physical world; second, by **reflection** we come to have ideas of our own mental operations. Thus, for example, “hard,” “red,” “loud,” “cold,”

“sweet,” and “aromatic” are all ideas of sensation, while “perceiving,” “remembering,” “abstracting,” and “thinking” are all ideas of reflection. (“Pleasure,” “unity,” and “existence,” Locke held, are ideas that come to us from both sensation and reflection.) Everything we know, everything we believe, every thought we can entertain is made up of ideas of sensation and reflection and nothing else.

But wait. It isn’t true that I can think only about what I myself have experienced; I can certainly think about dinosaurs (or unicorns) even though I have never seen one for myself. So Locke’s claim must be about the ultimate origin of our ideas, the source of their content. He distinguished between simple and complex ideas and acknowledged that we often employ our mental capacities in order to manufacture complex ideas by conjoining simpler components. My idea of “unicorn,” for example, may be compounded from the ideas of “horse” and “single spiral horn,” and these ideas in turn are compounded from less complex elements. What Locke held was that every complex idea can be analyzed into component parts and that the final elements of any complete analysis must be simple ideas, each of which is derived directly from experience. Even so, the empiricist program is an ambitious one, and Locke devoted Book II of the *Essay* to a lengthy effort to show that every idea could, in principle, be derived from experience.⁽³⁴⁾

Focusing on the Big Ideas in Locke

— A Special Problem

Locke began his survey of our mental contents with the simple ideas of sensation, including those of colors, sounds, tastes, smells, shapes, size, and solidity. With just a little thought about specific examples of such ideas, we notice a significant difference among them: the color of the wall in front of me seems to vary widely from time to time, depending on the light in the room and the condition of my eyes, while its solidity persists independently of such factors.

Following the lead of Galileo and Boyle, Locke explained this difference in corpuscularian fashion, by reference to the different ways in which the qualities of things produce our ideas of them.

The **primary qualities** of an object are its intrinsic features, those it really has, including the “Bulk, Figure, Texture, and Motion” of its parts. (*Essay II viii 9*) Since these features are inseparable from the thing, even when it is divided into parts too small for us to perceive, the primary qualities are independent of our perception of them. When we do perceive the primary qualities of larger objects, Locke believed, our ideas exactly resemble the qualities as they are in things.

The **secondary qualities** of an object, on the other hand, are nothing in the thing itself but the power to produce in us the ideas of “Colors, Sounds, Smells, Tastes, etc.” (*Essay II viii 10*) In these cases, our ideas do not resemble their causes, which are in fact nothing other than the primary qualities of the insensible parts of things. The **powers**, or tertiary qualities, of an object are just its capacities to cause perceptible changes in other things.

Thus, for example, the primary qualities of a rose include all of its quantifiable features: its mass and momentum, its chemical composition and microscopic structure; these are the features of the thing itself. The secondary qualities of a rose, on the other hand, include the ideas it produces in me: its yellow color, its delicate fragrance; these are merely the effects of the primary qualities of its corpuscles on my eyes and nose. Like the pain I feel when I stick my finger on a thorn, the color and smell are not features of a rose itself.

Some distinction of this sort is important for any representative realist. Many instances of perceptual illusion can be explained by reference to the way secondary qualities depend upon our sensory organs, but the possibility of accurate information about the primary qualities is preserved, at least in principle. The botanical expert may be able to achieve detailed knowledge of the nature of roses, but that knowledge is not necessary for my appreciation of their beauty. ⁽³⁴⁾

Focusing on the Big Ideas in Locke — Complex Ideas

Even if the simple ideas of sensation provide us with ample material for thinking, what we make of them is largely up to us. In his survey of ideas of reflection, Locke listed a variety of mental operations that we perform upon our ideas.

Notice that in each of these sections (*Essay II ix-xii*), Locke defined the relevant mental operations as we experience them in ourselves, but then went on to consider carefully the extent to which other animals seem capable of performing the same activities. This procedure has different results from Descartes's doctrinal rejection of animal thinking: according to Locke, only abstraction (the operation most crucial in forming the ideas of mixed modes, on which morality depends) is utterly beyond the capacity of any animal. (*Essay II xi 10*)

Perception of ideas through the senses and retention of ideas in memory, Locke held, are passive powers of the mind, beyond our direct voluntary control and heavily dependent on the material conditions of the human body. The active powers of the mind include distinguishing, comparing, compounding, and abstracting. It is by employing these powers, Locke supposed, that we manufacture new, complex ideas from the simple elements provided by experience. The resulting complex ideas are of three sorts: (*Essay II xii 4-7*)

- **Modes** are complex ideas that combine simpler elements to form a new whole that is assumed to be incapable of existing except as a part or feature of something else. The ideas of “three,” “seventy-five,” and even “infinity,” for example, are all modes derived from the simple idea of “unity.” We can understand these ideas and know their mathematical functions, whether or not there actually exist numbers of things to which they would apply in reality. “Mixed modes”

similarly combine simple components without any presumption about their conformity to existing patterns, yielding all of our complex ideas of human actions and their value.

- **Substances** are the complex ideas of real particular things that are supposed to exist on their own and to account for the unity and persistence of the features they exhibit. The ideas of “my only son,” “the largest planet in the solar system,” and “tulips,” for example, are compounded from simpler ideas of sensation and reflection. Each is the idea of a thing (or kind of thing) that could really exist on its own. Since we don’t understand all of the inner workings of natural objects, Locke supposed, our complex ideas of substances usually rely heavily on their secondary qualities and powers—the effects they are observed to have on ourselves and other things.
- **Relations** are complex ideas of the ways in which other ideas may be connected with each other, in fact or in thought. The ideas of “younger,” “stronger,” and “cause and effect,” for example, all involve some reference to the comparison of two or more other ideas.

Locke obviously could not analyze the content of every particular idea that any individual has ever had. But his defense of the empiricist principle did require him to show in principle that any complex idea can be derived from the simple ideas of sensation and reflection. The clarity, reality, adequacy, and truth of all of our ideas, Locke supposed, depend upon the success with which they fulfill their representative function. Next, we’ll consider one of the most significant and difficult examples from each category. ⁽³⁴⁾

Focusing on the Big Ideas in Locke – Free Action

Among our modal ideas, Locke believed that those of mixed modes,

which combine both sensory and reflective elements, are especially important, since they include the ideas of human actions and provide for their moral evaluation. Among the mixed modes, the ideas of power, volition, and liberty are the most crucial and difficult; Locke devoted a chapter (II xxi) to them that grew, with alterations in later editions, to become the longest in the *Essay*.

The idea of power is illustrated every time we do something. Whether we think or move, the feeling that our mental preference leads to action provides a simple instance of power. The exercise of that power is volition or will, and the action taken as a result is a voluntary one. Liberty or freedom, in Locke's view, is the power to act on our volition, whatever it may be, without any external compulsion or restraint. (*Essay* II xxi 7-12)

Under these definitions, the question of whether we have free will does not arise for Locke, since it involves what would later come to be called a category mistake. In particular, it does not matter whether we have control over our own preferences, whether we are free to will whatever we wish. (*Essay* II xxi 23-25) In fact, Locke offered a strictly hedonistic account of human motivation, according to which our preferences are invariably determined by the desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain. (*Essay* II vii 3) What does matter for freedom and moral responsibility is that we can act on our preferences, whatever their source, without any outside interference. If I could have done otherwise (given a different preference), then I act freely and am responsible for my action.⁽³⁴⁾

22. Sufi Philosophy

Epistemological Grounding of Mystical Experience: Sufi Philosophy

To understand Al-Ghazali, we must consider his theory of knowledge and his conception of existence. Knowledge is various. It may be divided into two main divisions: that which depends ultimately on revelation and that which depends on reason. It is not necessary for the purpose we have at present in hand to consider the divisions and subdivisions of the former; but it is to be noted that, even in the matter of revelation, reason comes into play. For some of the truths of this department of knowledge are inferences or deductions from the fundamental truths which have been received by divine revelation, that is, from the verbal statements of the Qur'an; while others are the outcome of analogical reasoning based on similarly established beliefs and convictions.

Under the second division (reasons) we find: 1) Mathematics, Astronomy, Logic, etc., 2) Natural Sciences, and 3) Speculative Knowledge. One of the sub-divisions of this last division is Speculative Theology.

Now the knowledge of the Sufis is not solely either revelation or reason, but is a compound knowledge, for it depends on revealed truth and partly on speculation. ^(35/1)

23. What is Scientific Knowledge?

The Philosophy of Science: What is Scientific Knowledge?

Philosophy of science is a sub-field of philosophy concerned with the foundations, methods, and implications of science. The central questions of this study concern what qualifies as science, the reliability of scientific theories, and the ultimate purpose of science. This discipline is founded in epistemology, but overlaps with metaphysics when it explores the relationship between science and the nature of reality.

There is no consensus among philosophers about many of the central problems concerned with the philosophy of science, including whether science can reveal the truth about unobservable things and whether scientific reasoning can be justified at all. In addition to these general questions about science as a whole, philosophers of science consider problems that apply to particular sciences (such as biology or physics). Some philosophers of science also use contemporary results in science to reach conclusions about philosophy itself.

While philosophical thought pertaining to science dates back at least to the time of Aristotle, philosophy of science emerged as a distinct discipline only in the middle of the 20th century in the wake of the logical positivism movement, which aimed to formulate criteria for ensuring all philosophical statements' meaningfulness and objectively assessing them. Thomas Kuhn's landmark 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was also formative, challenging the view of scientific progress as steady, cumulative acquisition of knowledge based on a fixed method of systematic

experimentation and instead arguing that any progress is relative to a “paradigm,” the set of questions, concepts, and practices that define a scientific discipline in a particular historical period. Karl Popper and Charles Sanders Peirce moved on from positivism to establish a modern set of standards for scientific methodology. ⁽³⁶⁾

PART VI

MODULE 5: EXPLORING METAPHYSICS

24. Introduction

Exploring Metaphysics

Module Introduction

Topics

- Mind/Body
- Consciousness; Identity
- The role of evil; God

What is really real?

Who are we?

Are we really real?

Metaphysics, as we'd previously studied, asks the question, "What is really real?" It also serves to distinguish appearance from reality. In this module, we will be reading myriad sources about what constitutes the nature of reality from a cross-cultural perspective, as we search for understanding of the vast depth of perspectives of what seems to appear, at first to be such a trivial question.

Lastly, we will examine what constitutes the nature of the human person as a metaphysical entity.

Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate proficiency in critical thinking

2. Demonstrate understanding of Global Social Responsibility
3. Recognize the relationships between cultural expressions and their contexts
4. Understand cultural expressions
5. Interpret and evaluate cultural artifacts and/or their contexts for significance
6. Recognize concepts in metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology and the context of their development
7. Comprehend the scope of philosophic inquiry and how beliefs are formed and justified especially within a particular cultural construct
8. Understand the principles of freedom, determinism and moral responsibility in human interaction

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module the student will be able to:

- Define *ontology* and describe its related classifications in the history of ideas
- Contrast Materialism from Idealism; Define and compare Monism, Dualism, and Pluralism
- State the difference between a human person and a human being
- Define *Atman*
- Distinguish the ego theory of the self from the bundle theory
- Explain the mind/body problem ⁽¹⁾

Readings and Resources

- [Plato, Republic](#) Section 506c – 520a from Perseus Digital

Library, Tufts University

- [Metaphysics: Ship of Theseus](#) from Wikipedia.

Supplemental Materials

(Note: These materials are considered supplemental and thus are not used for assessment purposes)

- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) website
- [Leonardo DiCaprio & The Nature of Reality: Crash Course Philosophy # 4](#) by CrashCourse
- [“Man, as Project,”](#) by Ortega y Gasset and translated by Samuel P. Moody
- [Philosophy – Metaphysics: Ship of Theseus \[HD\]](#) by Wireless Philosophy
- [A Romp Through the Philosophy of Mind – Session One: Identity Theory and Why It Won't Work](#) by Marianne Talbot
- [Aquinas and the Cosmological Arguments: Crash Course Philosophy #10](#) by CrashCourse
- [Personal Identity: Crash Course Philosophy #19](#) by CrashCourse
- [Arguments Against Personal Identity: Crash Course Philosophy #20](#) by CrashCourse
- [Personhood: Crash Course Philosophy # 21](#) by CrashCourse
- [Where Does Your Mind Reside?: Crash Course Philosophy #22](#) by CrashCourse
- [Artificial Intelligence & Personhood: Crash Course Philosophy #23](#) by CrashCourse

Assignments & Learning Activities

- Review Introduction
- Review Readings and Resources
- Review Learning Unit
- Participate in Module 5 Discussion
- Work on Assignment: Thematic Synthesis Essay
- Take Quiz 2

25. Metaphysics

Metaphysics Introduction

Metaphysics, as we have previously studied, asks the question, “What is really real?” It also covers topics about ways in which we can “be” in this world, the nature of persons, and even philosophical proofs for the existence of God.

In this module, we will be reading a myriad of sources about these fascinating topics as we search for understanding of the vast depth of perspectives of what seems to appear, at first, to be such a trite or obvious question. We will focus our attention on examining what constitutes the very nature of identity and personhood itself as a metaphysical entity. Does it exist? Who are we? What are we? Does the self actually exist for real? ⁽¹⁾

Some Important Definitions

What Is Ontology in Metaphysics?

Ontology seeks to answer questions pertaining to being and existence. What exists?

Materialism

Belief that only physical things truly exist. Materialists claim (or promise) to explain every apparent instance of a mental phenomenon as a feature of some physical object. ⁽³⁸⁾

Idealism

Belief that only mental entities are real, so that physical things

exist only in the sense that they are perceived. ⁽³⁹⁾

Dualism

Belief that mental things and physical things are fundamentally distinct kinds of entities. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

26. God? Self?

Does God Exist? The Ontological and Cosmological Arguments

Ontological Argument

“An attempt to prove the existence of God by a priori reasoning from the content of the concept of God. As formulated by Anselm, the ontological argument begins with a notion of ‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived.’ Anything that satisfies this concept must exist in reality as well as in thought (since otherwise it would be possible to conceive something greater — one that really exists); hence, God exists.” ⁽⁴¹⁾

Cosmological Argument

“An attempt to prove the existence of God by appeal to contingent facts about the world. The first of Aquinas’s five ways (borrowed from Aristotle’s METAPHYSICS), begins from the fact that something is in motion: since everything that moves must be moved by another but the series of prior movers cannot extend infinitely, there must be a first mover (which is God). The second and third of the five ways begin from efficient causation and the existence of contingent beings.” ⁽⁴²⁾

Where Is the Self?

Read: [The Questions of King Milinda from Book II — Lakkhana Pañha](#)

[- The Distinguishing Characteristics of Ethical Qualities – Chapter 1](#) from Internet Sacred Text Archive website. ⁽⁴³⁾

27. What Survives Death?

Katha Upanishad: What Survives Death?

Read: [The Meaning of the Word Upanishad](#) by Max Müller from Internet Sacred Text Archive website. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Also review [Katha Upanishad](#) from Wikipedia ⁽⁴⁵⁾

The Katha Upanishad concludes its philosophical presentation in verses 14–15 of the Sixth Valli. The state of perfection, according to the last section of the Upanishad, explains Paul Deussen, consists “not in the attainment of a future or yonder world, but it is already just now and here for one who is Self-realized, who knows his Self (Soul) as Brahman (Cosmic Soul)”.

16. ‘There are a hundred and one arteries of the heart, one of them penetrates the crown of the head. Moving upwards by it, a man (at his death) reaches the Immortal; the other arteries serve for departing in different directions.’

17. ‘The Person not larger than a thumb, the inner Self, is always settled in the heart of men. Let a man draw that Self forth from his body with steadiness, as one draws the pith from a reed. Let him know that Self as the Bright, as the Immortal; yes, as the Bright, as the Immortal.’

18. Having received this knowledge taught by Death and the whole rule of Yoga (meditation), Nâkiketa became free from passion and death, and obtained Brahman. Thus it will be with another also who knows thus what relates to the Self.

19. May He protect us both! May He enjoy us both! May we acquire Strength together! May our knowledge become bright! May we never quarrel! Om! Peace! peace! peace! Harih, Om! ⁽⁴⁶⁾

Plato: Republic on the Way of Knowing and the Way of Being: What Is Really Real? How Do We Know? ⁽¹⁾

Reading: from [Plato, Republic — \(selections from Books V1.506c–V11 520a\)](#) by Perseus Digital Library ⁽⁴⁷⁾

28. Plato, Republic

Plato, Republic

Prelude: The Context and Meaning within the Allegory of the Cave and Divided Line

[506c] **“But then,” said I, “do you think it right to speak as having knowledge about things one does not know?”** “By no means,” he said, **“as having knowledge, but one ought to be willing to tell as his opinion what he opines.”** “Nay,” said I, **“have you not observed that opinions divorced from knowledge are ugly things? The best of them are blind. Or do you think that those who hold some true opinion without intelligence differ appreciably from blind men who go the right way?”** “They do not differ at all,” he said. “Is it, then, ugly things that you prefer.”⁽⁴⁷⁾ [506d] to contemplate, things blind and crooked, when you might hear from others what is luminous and fair?” “Nay, in heaven’s name, Socrates,” said Glaucon, “do not draw back, as it were, at the very goal. For it will content us if you explain the good even as you set forth the nature of justice, sobriety, and the other virtues.” “It will right well content me, my dear fellow,” I said, “but I fear that my powers may fail and that in my eagerness I may cut a sorry figure and become a laughing-stock. Nay, my beloved,⁽⁴⁸⁾ [506e] **let us dismiss for the time being the nature of the good in itself; for to attain to my present surmise of that seems a pitch above the impulse that wings my flight today. But of what seems to be the offspring of the good and most nearly made in its likeness I am willing to speak if you too wish it, and otherwise to let the matter drop.**” “Well, speak on,” he said, “for you will duly pay me the tale of the parent another time.” “I could wish,”⁽⁴⁹⁾ [507a] I said, “that I were able to make and you to receive the payment and not merely as now the interest. But at any rate receive this interest and the offspring of the good. Have a care,

however, lest I deceive you unintentionally with a false reckoning of the interest.”⁽⁵⁰⁾

“We will do our best,” he said, “to be on our guard. Only speak on.” “Yes,” I said, “after first coming to an understanding with you and reminding you of what has been said here before and often on other occasions.”⁽⁵⁰⁾ [507b] **“What?” said he. “We predicate ‘to be’ of many beautiful things and many good things, saying of them severally that they are, and so define them in our speech.” “We do.” “And again, we speak of a self-beautiful and of a good that is only and merely good, and so, in the case of all the things that we then posited as many, we turn about and posit each as a single idea or aspect, assuming it to be a unity and call it that which each really is. “It is so.” “And the one class of things we say can be seen but not thought,**⁽⁵¹⁾ [507c] **while the ideas can be thought but not seen.” “By all means.” “With which of the parts of ourselves, with which of our faculties, then, do we see visible things?” “With sight,” he said. “And do we not,” I said, “hear audibles with hearing, and perceive all sensibles with the other senses?” “Surely.” “Have you ever observed,” said I, “how much the greatest expenditure the creator of the senses has lavished on the faculty of seeing and being seen? “Why, no, I have not,” he said. “Well, look at it thus. Do hearing and voice stand in need of another medium so that the one may hear and the other be heard,**⁽⁵²⁾ [507d] **in the absence of which third element the one will not hear and the other not be heard?” “They need nothing,” he said. “Neither, I fancy,” said I, “do many others, not to say that none require anything of the sort. Or do you know of any?” “Not I,” he said. “But do you not observe that vision and the visible do have this further need?” “How?” “Though vision may be in the eyes and its possessor may try to use it, and though color be present, yet without**⁽⁵³⁾ [507e] **the presence of a third thing specifically and naturally adapted to this purpose, you are aware that vision will see nothing and the colors will remain invisible.” “What is this thing of which you speak?” he said. “The thing,” I said, “that you call light.” “You say truly,” he replied. “The bond, then, that yokes together**⁽⁵⁴⁾

[508a] **visibility and the faculty of sight is more precious by**

no slight form that which unites the other pairs, if light is not without honor.” “It surely is far from being so,” he said. ⁽⁵⁵⁾

“Which one can you name of the divinities in heaven as the author and cause of this, whose light makes our vision see best and visible things to be seen?” “Why, the one that you too and other people mean,” he said; “for your question evidently refers to the sun.” “Is not this, then, the relation of vision to that divinity?” “What?” “Neither vision itself nor is its vehicle, which we call the eye, identical with the sun.” ⁽⁵⁵⁾ [508b] “Why, no.” “But it is, I think, the most sunlike of all the instruments of sense.” “By far the most.” “And does it not receive the power which it possesses as an influx, as it were, dispensed from the sun?” “Certainly.” “Is it not also true that the sun is not vision, yet as being the cause thereof is beheld by vision itself?” “That is so,” he said. “This, then, you must understand that I meant by the offspring of the good which the good ⁽⁵⁶⁾ [508c] begot to stand in a proportion with itself: as the good is in the intelligible region to reason and the objects of reason, so is this in the visible world to vision and the objects of vision.” “How is that?” he said; “explain further.” “You are aware,” I said, “that when the eyes are no longer turned upon objects upon whose colors the light of day falls but that of the dim luminaries of night, their edge is blunted and they appear almost blind, as if pure vision did not dwell in them.” “Yes, indeed,” he said. “But when, I take it, ⁽⁵⁷⁾ [508d] they are directed upon objects illumined by the sun, they see clearly, and vision appears to reside in these same eyes.” “Certainly.” ⁽⁵⁸⁾

“Apply this comparison to the soul also in this way. When it is firmly fixed on the domain where truth and reality shine resplendent it apprehends and knows them and appears to possess reason; but when it inclines to that region which is mingled with darkness, the world of becoming and passing away, it opines only and its edge is blunted, and it shifts its opinions hither and thither, and again seems as if it lacked reason.” ⁽⁵⁸⁾ [508e] “Yes, it does,” “This reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower, you must say is the idea of good, and you must conceive it

as being the cause of knowledge, and of truth in so far as known. Yet fair as they both are, knowledge and truth, in supposing it to be something fairer still than these you will think rightly of it. But as for knowledge and truth, even as in our illustration ⁽⁵⁹⁾ [509a] it is right to deem light and vision sunlike, but never to think that they are the sun, so here it is right to consider these two their counterparts, as being like the good or boniform, but to think that either of them is the good is not right. Still higher honor belongs to the possession and habit of the good." "An inconceivable beauty you speak of," he said, "if it is the source of knowledge and truth, and yet itself surpasses them in beauty. For you surely cannot mean that it is pleasure." "Hush," said I, "but examine ⁽⁶⁰⁾ [509b] the similitude of it still further in this way." "How?" "The sun, I presume you will say, not only furnishes to visibles the power of visibility but it also provides for their generation and growth and nurture though it is not itself generation." "Of course not." "In like manner, then, you are to say that the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power." ⁽⁶¹⁾

[509c] And Glaucon very ludicrously said, "Heaven save us, hyperbole can no further go." "The fault is yours," I said, "for compelling me to utter my thoughts about it." "And don't desist," he said, "but at least expound the similitude of the sun, if there is anything that you are omitting." "Why, certainly," I said, "I am omitting a great deal." "Well, don't omit the least bit," he said. "I fancy," I said, "that I shall have to pass over much, but nevertheless so far as it is at present practicable I shall not willingly leave anything out." "Do not," ⁽⁶²⁾

29. The Analysis of the Divided Line

The Analysis of the Divided Line

[509d] he said. “Conceive then,” said I, “as we were saying, that there are these two entities, and that one of them is sovereign over the intelligible order and region and the other over the world of the eye-ball, not to say the sky-ball, but let that pass. You surely apprehend the two types, the visible and the intelligible.” “I do.” “Represent them then, as it were, by a line divided into two unequal sections and cut each section again in the same ratio (the section, that is, of the visible and that of the intelligible order), and then as an expression of the ratio of their comparative clearness and obscurity you will have, as one of the sections⁽⁶³⁾ [509e] of the visible world, images. By images I mean⁽⁶⁴⁾ [510a] first, shadows, and then reflections in water and on surfaces of dense, smooth and bright texture, and everything of that kind, if you apprehend.” “I do.” “As the second section assume that of which this is a likeness or an image, that is, the animals about us and all plants and the whole class of objects made by man.” “I so assume it,” he said. “Would you be willing to say,” said I, “that the division in respect of reality and truth or the opposite is expressed by the proportion: as is the opinable to the knowable so is the likeness to that⁽⁶⁵⁾ [510b] of which it is a likeness?”

“I certainly would.” “Consider then again the way in which we are to make the division of the intelligible section.” “In what way?” “By the distinction that there is one section of it which the soul is compelled to investigate by treating as images the things imitated in the former division, and by means of assumptions from which it proceeds not up to a first principle but down to a conclusion, while

there is another section in which it advances from its assumption to a beginning or principle that transcends assumption, and in which it makes no use of the images employed by the other section, relying on ideas only and progressing systematically through ideas." "I don't fully understand what you mean by this," he said. "Well, I will try again," ⁽⁶⁶⁾ [510c] said I," for you will better understand after this preamble. For I think you are aware that students of geometry and reckoning and such subjects first postulate the odd and the even and the various figures and three kinds of angles and other things akin to these in each branch of science, regard them as known, and, treating them as absolute assumptions, do not deign to render any further account of them to themselves or others, taking it for granted that they are obvious to everybody. ⁽⁶⁷⁾

They take their start ⁽⁶⁷⁾ [510d] from these, and pursuing the inquiry from this point on consistently, conclude with that for the investigation of which they set out." "Certainly," he said, "I know that." "And do you not also know that they further make use of the visible forms and talk about them, though they are not thinking of them but of those things of which they are a likeness, pursuing their inquiry for the sake of the square as such and the diagonal as such, and not for the sake of the image of it which they draw?" ⁽⁶⁸⁾ [510e] And so in all cases. The very things which they mold and draw, which have shadows and images of themselves in water, these things they treat in their turn as only images, but what they really seek is to get sight of those realities which can be seen ⁽⁶⁹⁾ [511a] only by the mind." "True," he said.

"This then is the class that I described as intelligible, it is true but with the reservation first that the soul is compelled to employ assumptions in the investigation of it, not proceeding to a first principle because of its inability to extricate itself from and rise above its assumptions, and second, that it uses as images or likenesses the very objects that are themselves copied and adumbrated by the class below them, and that in comparison with these latter are esteemed as clear and held in honor" "I understand," ⁽⁷⁰⁾

[511b] said he, “that you are speaking of what falls under geometry and the kindred arts.” “Understand then,” said I, “that by the other section of the intelligible I mean that which the reason itself lays hold of by the power of dialectics, treating its assumptions not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypotheses underpinnings, footings and springboards so to speak, to enable it to rise to that which requires no assumption and is the starting-point of all, and after attaining to that again taking hold of the first dependencies from it, so to proceed downward to the conclusion, ⁽⁷¹⁾ [511c] making no use whatever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving on through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas. “I understand,” he said; “not fully, for it is no slight task that you appear to have in mind, but I do understand that you mean to distinguish the aspect of reality and the intelligible, which is contemplated by the power of dialectic, as something truer and more exact than the object of the so-called arts and sciences whose assumptions are arbitrary starting-points. And though it is true that those who contemplate them are compelled to use their understanding and not ⁽⁷²⁾ [511d] their senses, yet because they do not go back to the beginning in the study of them but start from assumptions you do not think they possess true intelligence about them although the things themselves are intelligibles when apprehended in conjunction with a first principle. And I think you call the mental habit of geometers and their like mind or understanding and not reason because you regard understanding as something intermediate between opinion and reason.” “Your interpretation is quite sufficient,” I said; “and now, answering to these four sections, assume these four affections occurring in the soul: intellection or reason for the highest, ⁽⁷³⁾ [511e] understanding for the second; assign belief to the third, and to the last picture-thinking or conjecture and arrange them in a proportion considering that they participate in clearness and precision in the same degree as their objects partake of truth and reality.” “I understand,” he said; “I concur and arrange them as you bid.” ⁽⁷⁴⁾

30. The Allegory of the Cave

The Allegory of the Cave

BOOK VII (514a) “Next,” said I, “compare our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this. Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern with a long entrance open to the light on its entire width. Conceive them as having their legs and necks fettered from childhood, so that they remain in the same spot, ⁽⁷⁵⁾ [514b] able to look forward only, and prevented by the fetters from turning their heads. Picture further the light from a fire burning higher up and at a distance behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them a road along which a low wall has been built, as the exhibitors of puppet-shows have partitions before the men themselves, above which they show the puppets.” “All that I see,” he said. “See also, then, men carrying past the wall ⁽⁷⁶⁾ [514c] implements of all kinds that rise above the wall, and human images ⁽⁷⁷⁾ [515a] and shapes of animals as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material, some of these bearers presumably speaking and others silent.” “A strange image you speak of,” he said, “and strange prisoners.” “Like to us,” I said; “for, to begin with, tell me do you think that these men would have seen anything of themselves or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?” “How could they,” he said, “if they were compelled ⁽⁷⁸⁾ [515b] to hold their heads unmoved through life?”

“And again, would not the same be true of the objects carried past them?” “Surely.” “If then they were able to talk to one another, do you not think that they would suppose that in naming the things that they saw they were naming the passing objects?” “Necessarily.” “And if their prison had an echo from the wall opposite them, when one of the passersby uttered a sound, do you think that they would

suppose anything else than the passing shadow to be the speaker?" "By Zeus, I do not," said he. "Then in every way ⁽⁷⁹⁾ [515c] such prisoners would deem reality to be nothing else than the shadows of the artificial objects." "Quite inevitably," he said. "Consider, then, what would be the manner of the release and healing from these bonds and this folly if in the course of nature something of this sort should happen to them: When one was freed from his fetters and compelled to stand up suddenly and turn his head around and walk and to lift up his eyes to the light, and in doing all this felt pain and, because of the dazzle and glitter of the light, was unable to discern the objects whose shadows he formerly saw ⁽⁸⁰⁾ [515d] what do you suppose would be his answer if someone told him that what he had seen before was all a cheat and an illusion, but that now, being nearer to reality and turned toward more real things, he saw more truly? And if also one should point out to him each of the passing objects and constrain him by questions to say what it is, do you not think that he would be at a loss¹ and that he would regard what he formerly saw as more real than the things now pointed out to him?" "Far more real," he said.

"And if he were compelled to look at the light itself, ⁽⁸¹⁾ [515e] would not that pain his eyes, and would he not turn away and flee to those things which he is able to discern and regard them as in very deed more clear and exact than the objects pointed out?" "It is so," he said. "And if," said I, "someone should drag him thence by force up the ascent which is rough and steep, and not let him go before he had drawn him out into the light of the sun, do you not think that he would find it painful to be so haled along, and would chafe at it, and when ⁽⁸²⁾ [516a] he came out into the light, that his eyes would be filled with its beams so that he would not be able to see even one of the things that we call real?" "Why, no, not immediately," he said. "Then there would be need of habituation, I take it, to enable him to see the things higher up. And at first he would most easily discern the shadows and, after that, the likenesses or reflections in water of men and other things, and later, the things themselves, and from these he would go on to contemplate the appearances

in the heavens and heaven itself, more easily by night, looking at the light ⁽⁸³⁾ [516b] of the stars and the moon, than by day the sun and the sun's light." "Of course." "And so, finally, I suppose, he would be able to look upon the sun itself and see its true nature, not by reflections in water or phantasms of it in an alien setting, but in and by itself in its own place." "Necessarily," he said. "And at this point he would infer and conclude that this it is that provides the seasons and the courses of the year and presides over all things in the visible region, ⁽⁸⁴⁾ [516c] and is in some sort the cause of all these things that they had seen."

"Obviously," he said, "that would be the next step." "Well then, if he recalled to mind his first habitation and what passed for wisdom there, and his fellow-bondsmen, do you not think that he would count himself happy in the change and pity them?" "He would indeed." "And if there had been honors and commendations among them which they bestowed on one another and prizes for the man who is quickest to make out the shadows as they pass and best able to remember their customary precedences, ⁽⁸⁵⁾ [516d] sequences and co-existences, and so most successful in guessing at what was to come, do you think he would be very keen about such rewards, and that he would envy and emulate those who were honored by these prisoners and lorded it among them, or that he would feel with Homer and "greatly prefer while living on earth to be serf of another, a landless man," and endure anything rather than opine with them ⁽⁸⁶⁾ [516e] and live that life?" "Yes," he said, "I think that he would choose to endure anything rather than such a life." "And consider this also," said I, "if such a one should go down again and take his old place would he not get his eyes full of darkness, thus suddenly coming out of the sunlight?" "He would indeed." "Now if he should be required to contend with these perpetual prisoners ⁽⁸⁷⁾ [517a] in 'evaluating' these shadows while his vision was still dim and before his eyes were accustomed to the dark — and this time required for habituation would not be very short — would he not provoke laughter, and would it not be said of him that he had returned from his journey aloft with his eyes ruined and that it was

not worth while even to attempt the ascent? And if it were possible to lay hands on and to kill the man who tried to release them and lead them up, would they not kill him?" "They certainly would," he said.

"This image then, dear Glaucon, we must apply as a whole to all that has been said, ⁽⁸⁸⁾ [517b] likening the region revealed through sight to the habitation of the prison, and the light of the fire in it to the power of the sun. And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear. But God knows whether it is true. But, at any rate, my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, ⁽⁸⁹⁾ [517c] and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this." "I concur," he said, "so far as I am able." "Come then," I said, "and join me in this further thought, and do not be surprised that those who have attained to this height are not willing to occupy themselves with the affairs of men, but their souls ever feel the upward urge and ⁽⁹⁰⁾ [517d] the yearning for that sojourn above. For this, I take it, is likely if in this point too the likeness of our image holds" "Yes, it is likely."

"And again, do you think it at all strange," said I, "if a man returning from divine contemplations to the petty miseries of men cuts a sorry figure and appears most ridiculous, if, while still blinking through the gloom, and before he has become sufficiently accustomed to the environing darkness, he is compelled in courtrooms or elsewhere to contend about the shadows of justice or the images that cast the shadows and to wrangle in debate ⁽⁹¹⁾ [517e] about the notions of these things in the minds of those who have never seen justice itself?" "It would be by no men strange," he said. "But a sensible man ⁽⁹²⁾ [518a] I said, "would remember that there

are two distinct disturbances of the eyes arising from two causes, according as the shift is from light to darkness or from darkness to light, and, believing that the same thing happens to the soul too, whenever he saw a soul perturbed and unable to discern something, he would not laugh unthinkingly, but would observe whether coming from a brighter life its vision was obscured by the unfamiliar darkness, or ⁽⁹³⁾ [518b] whether the passage from the deeper dark of ignorance into a more luminous world and the greater brightness had dazzled its vision. And so he would deem the one happy in its experience and way of life and pity the other, and if it pleased him to laugh at it, his laughter would be less laughable than that at the expense of the soul that had come down from the light above.” “That is a very fair statement,” he said.

“Then, if this is true, our view of these matters must be this, that education is not in reality what some people proclaim it to be in their professions. ⁽⁹⁴⁾

[518c] What they aver is that they can put true knowledge into a soul that does not possess it, as if they were inserting vision into blind eyes.” “They do indeed,” he said. “But our present argument indicates,” said I, “that the true analogy for this indwelling power in the soul and the instrument whereby each of us apprehends is that of an eye that could not be converted to the light from the darkness except by turning the whole body. Even so this organ of knowledge must be turned around from the world of becoming together with the entire soul, like the scene-shifting periact in the theater, until the soul is able to endure the contemplation of essence and the brightest region of being. ⁽⁹⁵⁾ [518d] And this, we say, is the good, do we not?” “Yes.” “Of this very thing, then,” I said, “there might be an art, an art of the speediest and most effective shifting or conversion of the soul, not an art of producing vision in it, but on the assumption that it possesses vision but does not rightly direct it and does not look where it should, an art of bringing this about.” “Yes, that seems likely,” he said. “Then the other so-called virtues of the soul do seem akin to those of the body. ⁽⁹⁶⁾

[518e] For it is true that where they do not pre-exist, they are

afterwards created by habit and practice. But the excellence of thought, it seems, is certainly of a more divine quality, a thing that never loses its potency, but, according to the direction of its conversion, becomes useful and beneficent,⁽⁹⁷⁾ [519a] or, again, useless and harmful. Have you never observed in those who are popularly spoken of as bad, but smart men, how keen is the vision of the little soul, how quick it is to discern the things that interest it, a proof that it is not a poor vision which it has, but one forcibly enlisted in the service of evil, so that the sharper its sight the more mischief it accomplishes?" "I certainly have," he said. "Observe then," said I, "that this part of such a soul, if it had been hammered from childhood, and had thus been struck free of the leaden weights, so to speak, of our birth⁽⁹⁸⁾ [519b] and becoming, which attaching themselves to it by food and similar pleasures and gluttonies turn downwards the vision of the soul — If, I say, freed from these, it had suffered a conversion towards the things that are real and true, that same faculty of the same men would have been most keen in its vision of the higher things, just as it is for the things toward which it is now turned." "It is likely," he said. "Well, then," said I, "is not this also likely and a necessary consequence of what has been said, that neither could men who are uneducated and inexperienced in truth ever adequately⁽⁹⁹⁾ [519c] preside over a state, nor could those who had been permitted to linger on to the end in the pursuit of culture — the one because they have no single aim and purpose in life to which all their actions, public and private, must be directed, and the others, because they will not voluntarily engage in action, believing that while still living they have been transported to the Islands of the Blest."

"True," he said. "It is the duty of us, the founders, then," said I, "to compel the best natures to attain the knowledge which we pronounced the greatest, and to win to the vision of the good,⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ [519d] to scale that ascent, and when they have reached the heights and taken an adequate view, we must not allow what is now permitted." "What is that?" "That they should linger there," I said, "and refuse to go down again among those bondsmen and

share their labors and honors, whether they are of less or of greater worth.” “Do you mean to say that we must do them this wrong, and compel them to live an inferior life when the better is in their power?” ⁽¹⁰¹⁾[519e] “You have again forgotten, my friend,” said I, “that the law is not concerned with the special happiness of any class in the state, but is trying to produce this condition in the city as a whole, harmonizing and adapting the citizens to one another by persuasion and compulsion, and requiring them to impart to one another any benefit ⁽¹⁰²⁾[520a] which they are severally able to bestow upon the community, and that it itself creates such men in the state, not that it may allow each to take what course pleases him, but with a view to using them for the binding together of the commonwealth.” “True,” he said, “I did forget it.” “Observe, then, Glaucon,” said I, “that we shall not be wronging, either, the philosophers who arise among us, but that we can justify our action when we constrain them to take charge of the other citizens and be their guardians. ⁽¹⁰³⁾

PART VII

MODULE 6: PHILOSOPHY IN PRACTICE

31. Introduction

Philosophy in Practice

Module Introduction

Topics

- What is justice? Social justice; God;
- The legitimacy of moral responsibility;
- The role of evil; ***Sophrosyne*** in Philosophia

“I am I”; “You are also that” –exploring the big questions in today’s world. What is Justice?

Remembering Plato

Exploring the Big Questions in today’s World:

Cross Currents: What is Justice? Are we free or determined? What would justice look like in a predestined world?

At the beginning of this course, we noted that twentieth-century philosopher Alfred North Whitehead described all Western philosophy as a footnote to Plato. In fact, there is hardly an area of Philosophy about which Plato has not explored. Though a philosopher who died in the fourth century B.C.E., his Academy became a syncretic center of learning bringing together eclectic

themes from the ancient past, and remaining a bastion of learning until 529 C.E.

In this module, we will review the major ideas that we've studied in Plato thus far, and added a few more, in an attempt to trace themes that comprise the Platonic worldview, as it developed and transformed from its inception in Classical Antiquity to the time of Boethius in the Early Christian Era. ⁽¹⁾

Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate proficiency in critical thinking
2. Demonstrate understanding of Global Social Responsibility
3. Recognize the relationships between cultural expressions and their contexts
4. Recognize concepts in metaphysics, axiology, and epistemology and the context of their development
5. Understand the principles of freedom, determinism and moral responsibility in human interaction
6. Identify the various attempts to formulate and define social justice

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module the student will be able to:

- Explain “the philosophical digression” in Plato’s *Seventh Letter*.
- Explain positions related to free will and determinism
- Provide an outline of Plato’s *Republic* and its significance to the history of ideas.
- Discuss the Myth of Er and the themes of free will and determinism. ⁽¹⁾

Readings and Resources

- [Plato, Republic](#) (Section 614a–621d from book 10) from Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University

Supplemental Materials

(Note: These materials are considered supplemental and thus are not used for assessment purposes)

- [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) website
- [Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy](#) by H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand

Assignments & Learning Activities

- Review Introduction
- Review Readings and Resources
- Review Learning Unit
- Participate in Module 6 Discussion
- Work on Assignment: Socratic Essay

32. Free Will and Determinism

Plato and Boethius

Two Perspectives on Justice, Free Will, and the Good

Re-membering Plato — What is Justice?

Cross Currents: What is Justice? Are we free or determined? What would justice look like in a predestined world?

In this module, we will review the major ideas that we've studied in Plato thus far, and a few more, in an attempt to trace themes that comprise the Platonic worldview, as it developed and transformed from its inception in Classical Antiquity to the time of Boethius in the Early Christian Era.

Specifically, we will review the development of Plato's epistemological method and then see how he uses it to justify his metaphysical view of justice; human freedom and determinism; social justice and civil disobedience; and eschatology: his vision of how bodies and immortal souls become bound together by Necessity in an eternal dance with the harmony of the spheres.

Finally, we will see how this vision is interpreted through the mind of another philosopher, Boethius, in his *Consolation of Philosophy*.⁽¹⁾

Overview on Free Will and Determinism

Please read [Free will](#) from Wikipedia. Read only Western Philosophy. ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

Reading Selection, from 7th Letter: **Plato**

Philosophical Digression

On this point I intend to speak a little more at length; for perhaps, when I have done so, things will be clearer with regard to my present subject. There is an argument which holds good against the man ventures to put anything whatever into writing on questions of this nature; it has often before been stated by me, and it seems suitable to the present occasion. ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

33. What Exists?

What Exists? How Do We Know? What Is Really Real? How Do We Apprehend It?

For everything that exists, there are three instruments by which the knowledge of it is necessarily imparted; fourth, there is the knowledge itself, and, as fifth, we must count the thing itself, which is known and truly exists. The first is the name, the, second the definition, the third. the image, and the fourth the knowledge. If you wish to learn what I mean, take these in the case of one instance, and so understand them in the case of all. A circle is a thing spoken of, and its name is that very word which we have just uttered. The second thing belonging to it is its definition, made up names and verbal forms. For that which has the name “round,” “annular,” or, “circle,” might be defined as that which has the distance from its circumference to its centre everywhere equal. Third, comes that which is drawn and rubbed out again, or turned on a lathe and broken up-none of which things can happen to the circle itself-to which the other things, mentioned have reference; for it is something of a different order from them. Fourth, comes knowledge, intelligence and right opinion about these things.

Under this one head we must group everything, which has its existence, not in words nor in bodily shapes, but in souls-from which it is dear that it is something different from the nature of the circle itself and from the three things mentioned before. Of these things intelligence comes closest in kinship and likeness to the fifth, and the others are farther distant. The same applies to straight as well as to circular form, to colours, to the good, the, beautiful, the just, to all bodies whether manufactured or coming into being in the course of nature, to fire, water, and all such things, to every living being, to character in souls, and to all things done and suffered.

For in the case of all these, no one, if he has not some how or other got hold of the four things first mentioned, can ever be completely a partaker of knowledge of the fifth. Further, on account of the weakness of language, these (i.e., the four) attempt to show what each thing is like, not less than what each thing is. For this reason no man of intelligence will venture to express his philosophical views in language, especially not in language that is unchangeable, which is true of that which is set down in written characters. Again you must learn the point, which comes next. Every circle, of those which are by the act of man drawn or even turned on a lathe, is full of that which is opposite to the fifth thing. For everywhere it has contact with the straight. But the circle itself, we say, has nothing in either smaller or greater, of that which is its opposite. We say also that the name is not a thing of permanence for any of them, and that nothing prevents the things now called round from being called straight, and the straight things round; for those who make changes and call things by opposite names, nothing will be less permanent (than a name).

Again with regard to the definition, if it is made up of names and verbal forms, the same remark holds that there is no sufficiently durable permanence in it. And there is no end to the instances of the ambiguity from which each of the four suffers; but the greatest of them is that which we mentioned a little earlier, that, whereas there are two things, that which has real being, and that which is only a quality, when the soul is seeking to know, not the quality, but the essence, each of the four, presenting to the soul by word and in act that which it is not seeking (i.e., the quality), a thing open to refutation by the senses, being merely the thing presented to the soul in each particular case whether by statement or the act of showing, fills, one may say, every man with puzzlement and perplexity.

Now in subjects in which, by reason of our defective education, we have not been accustomed even to search for the truth, but are satisfied with whatever images are presented to us, we are not held up to ridicule by one another, the questioned by questioners, who

can pull to pieces and criticize the four things. But in subjects where we try to compel a man to give a clear answer about the fifth, any one of those who are capable of overthrowing an antagonist gets the better of us, and makes the man, who gives an exposition in speech or writing or in replies to questions, appear to most of his hearers to know nothing of the things on which he is attempting to write or speak; for they are sometimes not aware that it is not the mind of the writer or speaker which is proved to be at fault, but the defective nature of each of the four instruments.

The process however of dealing with all of these, as the mind moves up and down to each in turn, does after much effort give birth in a well-constituted mind to knowledge of that which is well constituted. But if a man is ill-constituted by nature (as the state of the soul is naturally in the majority both in its capacity for learning and in what is called moral character) — or it may have become so by deterioration — not even Lynceus could endow such men with the power of sight.

In one word, the man who has no natural kinship with this matter cannot be made akin to it by quickness of learning or memory; for it cannot be engendered at all in natures which are foreign to it. Therefore, if men are not by nature kinship allied to justice and all other things that are honourable, though they may be good at learning and remembering other knowledge of various kinds—or if they have the kinship but are slow learners and have no memory—none of all these will ever learn to the full the truth about virtue and vice. For both must be learnt together; and together also must be learnt, by complete and long continued study, as I said at the beginning, the true and the false about all that has real being. After much effort, as names, definitions, sights, and other data of sense, are brought into contact and friction one with another, in the course of scrutiny and kindly testing by men who proceed by question and answer without ill will, with a sudden flash there shines forth understanding about every problem, and an intelligence whose efforts reach the furthest limits of human powers.

Therefore every man of worth, when dealing with matters of worth, will be far from exposing them to ill feeling and misunderstanding among men by committing them to writing. In one word, then, it may be known from this that, if one sees written treatises composed by anyone, either the laws of a lawgiver, or in any other form whatever, these are not for that man the things of most worth, if he is a man of worth, but that his treasures are laid up in the fairest spot that he possesses. But if these things were worked at by him as things of real worth, and committed to writing, then surely, not gods, but men “have themselves bereft him of his wits.” (105)

34. Plato's Republic (Book 10)

Plato's Republic (Book 10)

Plato's Myth of Er

Does justice have a reward? What is it? ⁽¹⁾

Certainly, he said, what you say is true.

These, then, are the prizes and rewards and gifts which are bestowed upon the just by gods and men in this present life, in addition to the other good things which justice of herself provides.

Yes, he said; and they are fair and lasting.

And yet, I said, all these are as nothing, either in number or greatness in comparison with those other recompenses which await both just and unjust after death. And you ought to hear them, and then both just and unjust will have received from us a full payment of the debt which the argument owes to them.

Speak, he said; there are few things, which I would more gladly hear. ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

35. Socrates

Socrates

Well, I said, I will tell you a tale; not one of the tales which Odysseus tells to the hero Alcinous, yet this too is a tale of a hero, Er the son of Armenius, a Pamphylian by birth. He was slain in battle, and ten days afterwards, when the bodies of the dead were taken up already in a state of corruption, his body was found unaffected by decay, and carried away home to be buried. And on the twelfth day, as he was lying on the funeral pile, he returned to life and told them what he had seen in the other world. He said that when his soul left the body he went on a journey with a great company, and that they came to a mysterious place at which there were two openings in the earth; they were near together, and over against them were two other openings in the heaven above.

In the intermediate space there were judges seated, who commanded the just, after they had given judgment on them and had bound their sentences in front of them, to ascend by the heavenly way on the right hand; and in like manner the unjust were bidden by them to descend by the lower way on the left hand; these also bore the symbols of their deeds, but fastened on their backs. He drew near, and they told him that he was to be the messenger who would carry the report of the other world to men, and they bade him hear and see all that was to be heard and seen in that place.

Then he beheld and saw on one side the souls departing at either opening of heaven and earth when sentence had been given on them; and at the two other openings other souls, some ascending out of the earth dusty and worn with travel, some descending out of heaven clean and bright. And arriving ever and anon they seemed to have come from a long journey, and they went forth with gladness into the meadow, where they encamped as at a festival; and those

who knew one another embraced and conversed, the souls which came from earth curiously enquiring about the things above, and the souls which came from heaven about the things beneath. And they told one another of what had happened by the way, those from below weeping and sorrowing at the remembrance of the things which they had endured and seen in their journey beneath the earth (now the journey lasted a thousand years), while those from above were describing heavenly delights and visions of inconceivable beauty.

The Story, Glaucon, would take too long to tell; but the sum was this: — He said that for every wrong which they had done to any one they suffered tenfold; or once in a hundred years — such being reckoned to be the length of man's life, and the penalty being thus paid ten times in a thousand years. If, for example, there were any who had been the cause of many deaths, or had betrayed or enslaved cities or armies, or been guilty of any other evil behaviour, for each and all of their offences they received punishment ten times over, and the rewards of beneficence and justice and holiness were in the same proportion.

I need hardly repeat what he said concerning young children dying almost as soon as they were born. Of piety and impiety to gods and parents, and of murderers, there were retributions other and greater far which he described. He mentioned that he was present when one of the spirits asked another, 'Where is Ardiaeus the Great?' (Now this Ardiaeus lived a thousand years before the time of Er: he had been the tyrant of some city of Pamphylia, and had murdered his aged father and his elder brother, and was said to have committed many other abominable crimes.)

The answer of the other spirit was: 'He comes not hither and will never come. And this,' said he, 'was one of the dreadful sights which we ourselves witnessed. We were at the mouth of the cavern, and, having completed all our experiences, were about to reascend, when of a sudden Ardiaeus appeared and several others, most of whom were tyrants; and there were also besides the tyrants private individuals who had been great criminals: they were just, as they

fancied, about to return into the upper world, but the mouth, instead of admitting them, gave a roar, whenever any of these incurable sinners or some one who had not been sufficiently punished tried to ascend; and then wild men of fiery aspect, who were standing by and heard the sound, seized and carried them off; and Ardiaeus and others they bound head and foot and hand, and threw them down and flayed them with scourges, and dragged them along the road at the side, carding them on thorns like wool, and declaring to the passers — by what were their crimes, and that they were being taken away to be cast into hell.' And of all the many terrors which they had endured, he said that there was none like the terror which each of them felt at that moment, lest they should hear the voice; and when there was silence, one by one they ascended with exceeding joy. These, said Er, were the penalties and retributions, and there were blessings as great. ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

Now when the spirits which were in the meadow had tarried seven days, on the eighth they were obliged to proceed on their journey, and, on the fourth day after, he said that they came to a place where they could see from above a line of light, straight as a column, extending right through the whole heaven and through the earth, in colour resembling the rainbow, only brighter and purer; another day's journey brought them to the place, and there, in the midst of the light, they saw the ends of the chains of heaven let down from above: for this light is the belt of heaven, and holds together the circle of the universe, like the under-girders of a trireme.

From these ends is extended the spindle of Necessity, on which all the revolutions turn. The shaft and hook of this spindle are made of steel, and the whorl is made partly of steel and also partly of other materials. Now the whorl is in form like the whorl used on earth; and the description of it implied that there is one large hollow whorl which is quite scooped out, and into this is fitted another lesser one, and another, and another, and four others, making eight in all, like vessels which fit into one another; the whorls show their edges on the upper side, and on their lower side all together form one

continuous whorl. This is pierced by the spindle, which is driven home through the centre of the eighth.

The first and outermost whorl has the rim broadest, and the seven inner whorls are narrower, in the following proportions — the sixth is next to the first in size, the fourth next to the sixth; then comes the eighth; the seventh is fifth, the fifth is sixth, the third is seventh, last and eighth comes the second. The largest (of fixed stars) is spangled, and the seventh (or sun) is brightest; the eighth (or moon) coloured by the reflected light of the seventh; the second and fifth (Saturn and Mercury) are in colour like one another, and yellower than the preceding; the third (Venus) has the whitest light; the fourth (Mars) is reddish; the sixth (Jupiter) is in whiteness second. Now the whole spindle has the same motion; but, as the whole revolves in one direction, the seven inner circles move slowly in the other, and of these the swiftest is the eighth; next in swiftness are the seventh, sixth, and fifth, which move together; third in swiftness appeared to move according to the law of this reversed motion the fourth; the third appeared fourth and the second fifth.

The spindle turns on the knees of Necessity; and on the upper surface of each circle is a siren, who goes round with them, hymning a single tone or note. The eight together form one harmony; and round about, at equal intervals, there is another band, three in number, each sitting upon her throne: these are the Fates, daughters of Necessity, who are clothed in white robes and have chaplets upon their heads, Lachesis and Clotho and Atropos, who accompany with their voices the harmony of the sirens — Lachesis singing of the past, Clotho of the present, Atropos of the future; Clotho from time to time assisting with a touch of her right hand the revolution of the outer circle of the whorl or spindle, and Atropos with her left hand touching and guiding the inner ones, and Lachesis laying hold of either in turn, first with one hand and then with the other.

When Er and the spirits arrived, their duty was to go at once to Lachesis; but first of all there came a prophet who arranged them in order; then he took from the knees of Lachesis lots and samples of

lives, and having mounted a high pulpit, spoke as follows: 'Hear the word of Lachesis, the daughter of Necessity. Mortal souls, behold a new cycle of life and mortality. Your genius will not be allotted to you, but you choose your genius; and let him who draws the first lot have the first choice, and the life which he chooses shall be his destiny. Virtue is free, and as a man honors or dishonors her he will have more or less of her; the responsibility is with the chooser — God is justified.' When the Interpreter had thus spoken he scattered lots indifferently among them all, and each of them took up the lot which fell near him, all but Er himself (he was not allowed), and each as he took his lot perceived the number which he had obtained. Then the Interpreter placed on the ground before them the samples of lives; and there were many more lives than the souls present, and they were of all sorts.

There were lives of every animal and of man in every condition. And there were tyrannies among them, some lasting out the tyrant's life, others which broke off in the middle and came to an end in poverty and exile and beggary; and there were lives of famous men, some who were famous for their form and beauty as well as for their strength and success in games, or, again, for their birth and the qualities of their ancestors; and some who were the reverse of famous for the opposite qualities. And of women likewise; there was not, however, any definite character them, because the soul, when choosing a new life, must of necessity become different. But there was every other quality, and the all mingled with one another, and also with elements of wealth and poverty, and disease and health; and there were mean states also.

And here, my dear Glaucon, is the supreme peril of our human state; and therefore the utmost care should be taken. Let each one of us leave every other kind of knowledge and seek and follow one thing only, if peradventure he may be able to learn and may find some one who will make him able to learn and discern between good and evil, and so to choose always and everywhere the better life as he has opportunity. He should consider the bearing of all these things which have been mentioned severally and collectively

upon virtue; he should know what the effect of beauty is when combined with poverty or wealth in a particular soul, and what are the good and evil consequences of noble and humble birth, of private and public station, of strength and weakness, of cleverness and dullness, and of all the soul, and the operation of them when conjoined; he will then look at the nature of the soul, and from the consideration of all these qualities he will be able to determine which is the better and which is the worse; and so he will choose, giving the name of evil to the life which will make his soul more unjust, and good to the life which will make his soul more just; all else he will disregard.

For we have seen and know that this is the best choice both in life and after death. A man must take with him into the world below an adamant faith in truth and right, that there too he may be undazzled by the desire of wealth or the other allurements of evil, lest, coming upon tyrannies and similar villainies, he do irremediable wrongs to others and suffer yet worse himself; but let him know how to choose the mean and avoid the extremes on either side, as far as possible, not only in this life but in all that which is to come. For this is the way of happiness.

And according to the report of the messenger from the other world this was what the prophet said at the time: 'Even for the last comer, if he chooses wisely and will live diligently, there is appointed a happy and not undesirable existence. Let not him who chooses first be careless, and let not the last despair.' And when he had spoken, he who had the first choice came forward and in a moment chose the greatest tyranny; his mind having been darkened by folly and sensuality, he had not thought out the whole matter before he chose, and did not at first sight perceive that he was fated, among other evils, to devour his own children. But when he had time to reflect, and saw what was in the lot, he began to beat his breast and lament over his choice, forgetting the proclamation of the prophet; for, instead of throwing the blame of his misfortune on himself, he accused chance and the gods, and everything rather than himself. Now he was one of those who came from heaven, and in a former

life had dwelt in a well-ordered State, but his virtue was a matter of habit only, and he had no philosophy.

And it was true of others who were similarly overtaken, that the greater number of them came from heaven and therefore they had never been schooled by trial, whereas the pilgrims who came from earth, having themselves suffered and seen others suffer, were not in a hurry to choose. And owing to this inexperience of theirs, and also because the lot was a chance, many of the souls exchanged a good destiny for an evil or an evil for a good. For if a man had always on his arrival in this world dedicated himself from the first to sound philosophy, and had been moderately fortunate in the number of the lot, he might, as the messenger reported, be happy here, and also his journey to another life and return to this, instead of being rough and underground, would be smooth and heavenly.

Most curious, he said, was the spectacle — sad and laughable and strange; for the choice of the souls was in most cases based on their experience of a previous life. There he saw the soul which had once been Orpheus choosing the life of a swan out of enmity to the race of women, hating to be born of a woman because they had been his murderers; he beheld also the soul of Thamyras choosing the life of a nightingale; birds, on the other hand, like the swan and other musicians, wanting to be men.

The soul which obtained the twentieth lot chose the life of a lion, and this was the soul of Ajax the son of Telamon, who would not be a man, remembering the injustice which was done him the judgment about the arms. The next was Agamemnon, who took the life of an eagle, because, like Ajax, he hated human nature by reason of his sufferings. About the middle came the lot of Atalanta; she, seeing the great fame of an athlete, was unable to resist the temptation: and after her there followed the soul of Epeus the son of Panopeus passing into the nature of a woman cunning in the arts; and far away among the last who chose, the soul of the jester Thersites was putting on the form of a monkey. There came also the soul of Odysseus having yet to make a choice, and his lot happened to be the last of them all.

Now the recollection of former tolls had disenchanted him of ambition, and he went about for a considerable time in search of the life of a private man who had no cares; he had some difficulty in finding this, which was lying about and had been neglected by everybody else; and when he saw it, he said that he would have done the had his lot been first instead of last, and that he was delighted to have it. And not only did men pass into animals, but I must also mention that there were animals tame and wild who changed into one another and into corresponding human natures — the good into the gentle and the evil into the savage, in all sorts of combinations.

All the souls had now chosen their lives, and they went in the order of their choice to Lachesis, who sent with them the genius whom they had severally chosen, to be the guardian of their lives and the fulfiller of the choice: this genius led the souls first to Clotho, and drew them within the revolution of the spindle impelled by her hand, thus ratifying the destiny of each; and then, when they were fastened to this, carried them to Atropos, who spun the threads and made them irreversible, whence without turning round they passed beneath the throne of Necessity; and when they had all passed, they marched on in a scorching heat to the plain of Forgetfulness, which was a barren waste destitute of trees and verdure; and then towards evening they encamped by the river of Unmindfulness, whose water no vessel can hold; of this they were all obliged to drink a certain quantity, and those who were not saved by wisdom drank more than was necessary; and each one as he drank forgot all things.

Now after they had gone to rest, about the middle of the night there was a thunderstorm and earthquake, and then in an instant they were driven upwards in all manner of ways to their birth, like stars shooting. He himself was hindered from drinking the water. But in what manner or by what means he returned to the body he could not say; only, in the morning, awaking suddenly, he found himself lying on the pyre.

And thus, Glaucon, the tale has been saved and has not perished, and will save us if we are obedient to the word spoken; and we

shall pass safely over the river of Forgetfulness and our soul will not be defiled. Wherefore my counsel is that we hold fast ever to the heavenly way and follow after justice and virtue always, considering that the soul is immortal and able to endure every sort of good and every sort of evil. Thus shall we live dear to one another and to the gods, both while remaining here and when, like conquerors in the games who go round to gather gifts, we receive our reward. And it shall be well with us both in this life and in the pilgrimage of a thousand years which we have been describing. ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

36. The Last Conversation Of Socrates

Prison Literature:

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (96e–97b)

Phaedo [96e] “By Zeus,” said he, “I am far from thinking that I know the cause of any of these things, I who do not even dare to say, when one is added to one, whether the one to which the addition was made has become two, or the one which was added, or the one which was added and ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ [97a] the one to which it was added became two by the addition of each to the other. I think it is wonderful that when each of them was separate from the other, each was one and they were not then two, and when they were brought near each other this juxtaposition was the cause of their becoming two. And I cannot yet believe that if one is divided, the division causes it to become two; for this is the opposite of ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ [97b] the cause which produced two in the former case; for then two arose because one was brought near and added to another one, and now because one is removed and separated from other. And I no longer believe that I know by this method even how one is generated or, in a word, how anything is generated or is destroyed or exists, and I no longer admit this method, but have another confused way of my own. ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (97b–97d)

“Then one day I heard a man reading from a book, as he said, by **Anaxagoras**, ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ [97c] **that it is the mind that arranges and causes all things**. I was pleased with this theory of cause, and it seemed to me to be somehow right that the mind should be the cause of all things, and I thought, ‘If this is so, the mind in arranging things arranges everything and establishes each thing as it is best for it to be. So if anyone wishes to find the cause of the generation or destruction or existence of a particular thing, he must find out what sort of existence, or passive state of any kind, or activity is best for it. And therefore in respect to ⁽¹¹⁰⁾ [97d] that particular thing, and other things too, **a man need examine nothing but what is best and most excellent; for then he will necessarily know also what is inferior, since the science of both is the same.** ⁽¹¹¹⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (97d–98b)

As I considered these things I was delighted to think that I had found in Anaxagoras a teacher of the cause of things quite to my mind, and I thought he would tell me whether the earth is flat or round, and when ⁽¹¹¹⁾ [97e] he had told me that, would go on to explain the cause and the necessity of it, and would tell me the nature of the best and why it is best for the earth to be as it is; and if he said the earth was in the center, he would proceed to show that it is best for it to be in the center; and I had made up my mind that ⁽¹¹²⁾ [98a] if he made those things clear to me, I would no longer yearn for any other kind of cause. And I had determined that I would find out in the same way about the sun and the moon and the other stars, their relative speed, their revolutions, and their other changes, and why the active or passive condition of each of them is for the best. For I never imagined that, when he

said they were ordered by intelligence, he would introduce any other cause for these things than that it is best for them to be as they are.⁽¹¹³⁾ [98b] So I thought when he assigned the cause of each thing and of all things in common he would go on and explain what is best for each and what is good for all in common. I prized my hopes very highly, and I seized the books very eagerly and read them as fast as I could, that I might know as fast as I could about the best and the worst.⁽¹¹⁴⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (98b–98e)

“My glorious hope, my friend, was quickly snatched away from me. As I went on with my reading I saw that the man made no use of intelligence,⁽¹¹⁴⁾ [98c] and did not assign any real causes for the ordering of things, but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other absurdities. And it seemed to me it was very much as if one should say that Socrates does with intelligence whatever he does, and then, in trying to give the causes of the particular thing I do, should say first that I am now sitting here because my body is composed of bones and sinews, and the bones are hard and have joints which divide them and the sinews⁽¹¹⁵⁾ [98d] can be contracted and relaxed and, with the flesh and the skin which contains them all, are laid about the bones; and so, as the bones are hung loose in their ligaments, the sinews, by relaxing and contracting, make me able to bend my limbs now, and that is the cause of my sitting here with my legs bent. Or as if in the same way he should give voice and air and hearing and countless other things of the sort as causes for our talking with each other,⁽¹¹⁶⁾ [98e] and should fail to mention the real causes, which are, that the Athenians decided that it was best to condemn me, and therefore I have decided that it was best for me to sit here and that it is right for me to stay and undergo whatever penalty they order.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (99a–99b)

[99a] For, by Dog, I fancy these bones and sinews of mine would have been in Megara or Boeotia long ago, carried thither by an opinion of what was best, if I did not think it was better and nobler to endure any penalty the city may inflict rather than to escape and run away. **But it is most absurd to call things of that sort causes.** If anyone were to say that I could not have done what I thought proper if I had not bones and sinews and other things that I have, he would be right. But to say that those things are the cause of my doing what I do⁽¹¹⁸⁾ [99b] and that I act with intelligence but not from the choice of what is best, would be an extremely careless way of talking.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (99b–99d)

Whoever talks in that way is unable to make a distinction and to see that in reality a cause is one thing, and the thing without which the cause could never be a cause is quite another thing. And so it seems to me that most people, when they give the name of cause to the latter, are groping in the dark, as it were, and are giving it a name that does not belong to it. And so one man makes the earth stay below the heavens by putting a vortex about it, and another regards the earth as a flat trough supported on a foundation of air; but they do not look for⁽¹¹⁹⁾ [99c] the power which causes things to be now placed as it is best for them to be placed, nor do they think it has any divine force, but they think they can find a new Atlas more powerful and more immortal and more all-embracing than this, and in truth they give no thought to the good, which must embrace and hold together all things. Now I would gladly be the pupil of anyone who would teach me the nature of such a cause; but since that was denied me and I was not able to discover it myself or to learn of it from anyone

else,⁽¹²⁰⁾ [99d] do you wish me, Cebes,” said he, “to give you an account of the way in which I have conducted my second voyage in quest of the cause?”⁽¹²¹⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (99d–100a)

“I wish it with all my heart,” he replied.

“After this, then,” said he, “since I had given up investigating realities, I decided that I must be careful not to suffer the misfortune which happens to people who look at the sun and watch it during an eclipse. For some of them ruin their eyes unless they look at its image in water⁽¹²¹⁾ [99e] or something of the sort. I thought of that danger, and I was afraid my soul would be blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with any of my senses. So I thought I must have recourse to conceptions and examine in them the truth of realities. Now perhaps my metaphor⁽¹²²⁾ [100a] is not quite accurate; for I do not grant in the least that he who studies realities by means of conceptions is looking at them in images any more than he who studies them in the facts of daily life. However, that is the way I began. I assume in each case some principle which I consider strongest, and whatever seems to me to agree with this, whether relating to cause or to anything else, I regard as true, and whatever disagrees with it, as untrue. But I want to tell you more clearly what I mean; for I think you do not understand now.”

“Not very well, certainly,” said Cebes.⁽¹²³⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (100b–107d)

[100b] “Well,” said Socrates, “this is what I mean. It is nothing new, but the same thing I have always been saying, both in our previous

conversation and elsewhere. **I am going to try to explain to you the nature of that cause which I have been studying, and I will revert to those familiar subjects of ours as my point of departure and assume that there are such things as absolute beauty and good and greatness and the like. If you grant this and agree that these exist, I believe I shall explain cause to you and shall prove that the soul is immortal.”...**

“But my friends,” he said, “we ought to bear in mind,⁽¹²⁴⁾ [107c] that, if the soul is immortal, we must care for it, not only in respect to this time, which we call life, but in respect to all time, and if we neglect it, the danger now appears to be terrible. For if death were an escape from everything, it would be a boon to the wicked, for when they die they would be freed from the body and from their wickedness together with their souls. But now, since the soul is seen to be immortal, it cannot escape⁽¹²⁵⁾ [107d] from evil or be saved in any other way than by becoming as good and wise as possible.⁽¹²⁶⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (107d–108a)

For the soul takes with it to the other world nothing but its education and nurture, and these are said to benefit or injure the departed greatly from the very beginning of his journey thither. And so it is said that after death, the tutelary genius of each person, to whom he had been allotted in life, leads him to a place where the dead are gathered together; then they are judged and depart to the other world⁽¹²⁶⁾ [107e] with the guide whose task it is to conduct thither those who come from this world; and when they have there received their due and remained through the time appointed, another guide brings them back after many long periods of time. And the journey is not as Telephus says in the play of Aeschylus;⁽¹²⁷⁾ [108a] for he says a simple path leads to the lower world, but I think the path is neither simple nor single, for if it were, there would be no need of guides, since no one could miss the way

to any place if there were only one road. But really there seem to be many forks of the road and many windings; this I infer from the rites and ceremonies practiced here on earth. ⁽¹²⁸⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (108a–108d)

Now the orderly and wise soul follows its guide and understands its circumstances; but the soul that is desirous of the body, as I said before, flits about it, and in the visible world for a long time, ⁽¹²⁸⁾ [108b] and after much resistance and many sufferings is led away with violence and with difficulty by its appointed genius. And when it arrives at the place where the other souls are, the soul which is impure and has done wrong, by committing wicked murders or other deeds akin to those and the works of kindred souls, is avoided and shunned by all, and no one is willing to be its companion or its guide, ⁽¹²⁹⁾ [108c] but it wanders about alone in utter bewilderment, during certain fixed times, after which it is carried by necessity to its fitting habitation. But the soul that has passed through life in purity and righteousness, finds gods for companions and guides, and goes to dwell in its proper dwelling. Now there are many wonderful regions of the earth, and the earth itself is neither in size nor in other respects such as it is supposed to be by those who habitually discourse about it, as I believe on someone's authority." ⁽¹³⁰⁾ [108d] And Simmias said, "What do you mean, Socrates? I have heard a good deal about the earth myself, but not what you believe; so I should like to hear it." ⁽¹³¹⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (108d–109a)

"Well Simmias, I do not think I need the art of Glaucus to tell what it is. But to prove that it is true would, I think, be too hard for the

art of Glaucus, and perhaps I should not be able to do it; besides, even if I had the skill, I think my life, Simmias, will end before the discussion could be finished. However, there is nothing to prevent my telling⁽¹³¹⁾ [108e] what I believe the form of the earth to be, and the regions in it."

"Well," said Simmias, "that will be enough."

"I am convinced, then," said he, "that in the first place, if the earth is round and in the middle of the heavens, it needs neither the air⁽¹³²⁾ [109a] nor any other similar force to keep it from falling, but its own equipoise and the homogeneous nature of the heavens on all sides suffice to hold it in place; for a body which is in equipoise and is placed in the center of something which is homogeneous cannot change its inclination in any direction, but will remain always in the same position. This, then, is the first thing of which I am convinced."

"And rightly," said Simmias.⁽¹³³⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (109a–109d)

"Secondly," said he, "I believe that the earth is very large and that we who dwell between the pillars of Hercules⁽¹³³⁾ [109b] and the river Phasis live in a small part of it about the sea, like ants or frogs about a pond, and that many other people live in many other such regions. For I believe there are in all directions on the earth many hollows of very various forms and sizes, into which the water and mist and air have run together; but the earth itself is pure and is situated in the pure heaven in which the stars are, the heaven which⁽¹³⁴⁾ [109c] those who discourse about such matters call the ether; the water, mist and air are the sediment of this and flow together into the hollows of the earth. Now we do not perceive that we live in the hollows, but think we live on the upper surface of the earth, just as if someone who lives in the depth of the ocean should think he lived on the surface of the sea, and, seeing the sun and the stars through the water, should think the sea was the sky, and should, by

reason of sluggishness or ⁽¹³⁵⁾ [109d] feebleness, never have reached the surface of the sea, and should never have seen, by rising and lifting his head out of the sea into our upper world, and should never have heard from anyone who had seen, how much purer and fairer it is than the world he lived in. ⁽¹³⁶⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (109d–110b)

I believe this is just the case with us; for we dwell in a hollow of the earth and think we dwell on its upper surface; and the air we call the heaven, and think that is the heaven in which the stars move. But the fact is the same, ⁽¹³⁶⁾ [109e] that by reason of feebleness and sluggishness, we are unable to attain to the upper surface of the air; for if anyone should come to the top of the air or should get wings and fly up, he could lift his head above it and see, as fishes lift their heads out of the water and see the things in our world, so he would see things in that upper world; and, if his nature were strong enough to bear the sight, he would recognize that that is the real heaven ⁽¹³⁷⁾ [110a] and the real light and the real earth. For this earth of ours, and the stones and the whole region where we live, are injured and corroded, as in the sea things are injured by the brine, and nothing of any account grows in the sea, and there is, one might say, nothing perfect there, but caverns and sand and endless mud and mire, where there is earth also, and there is nothing at all worthy to be compared with the beautiful things of our world. But the things in that world above would be seen to be even more superior to those in this world of ours. ⁽¹³⁸⁾ [110b] If I may tell a story, Simmias, about the things on the earth that is below the heaven, and what they are like, it is well worth hearing.” ⁽¹³⁹⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (110b–110e)

“By all means, Socrates,” said Simmias; “we should be glad to hear this story.”

“Well then, my friend,” said he, “to begin with, the earth when seen from above is said to look like those balls that are covered with twelve pieces of leather; it is divided into patches of various co⁽¹³⁹⁾ [110c] But there the whole earth is of such colors, and they are much brighter and purer than ours; for one part is purple of wonderful beauty, and one is golden, and one is white, whiter than chalk or snow, and the earth is made up of the other colors likewise, and they are more in number and more beautiful than those which we see here. For those very hollows of the earth which are full of water and air, present an appearance of colors, of which the colors which we see here may be regarded as samples, such as painters use⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ [110d] of color as they glisten amid the variety of the other colors, so that the whole produces one continuous effect of variety. And in this fair earth the things that grow, the trees, and flowers and fruits, are correspondingly beautiful; and so too the mountains and the stones are smoother, and more transparent and more lovely in color than ours. In fact, our highly prized stones, sards and⁽¹⁴¹⁾ [110e] jaspers, and emeralds, and other gems, are fragments of those there, but there everything is like these or still more beautiful.⁽¹⁴²⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (110e–111c)

And the reason of this is that there the stones are pure, and not corroded or defiled, as ours are, with filth and brine by the vapors and liquids which flow together here and which cause ugliness and disease in earth and stones and animals and plants. And the earth there is adorned with all the jewels and also with gold and⁽¹⁴²⁾ [111a] silver and everything of the sort. For there they are in plain sight,

abundant and large and in many places, so that the earth is a sight to make those blessed who look upon it. And there are many animals upon it, and men also, some dwelling inland, others on the coasts of the air, as we dwell about the sea, and others on islands, which the air flows around, near the mainland; and in short, what water and the sea are ⁽¹⁴³⁾ [111b] in our lives, air is in theirs, and what the air is to us, ether is to them. And the seasons are so tempered that people there have no diseases and live much longer than we, and in sight and hearing and wisdom and all such things are as much superior to us as air is purer than water or the ether than air. And they have sacred groves and temples of the gods, in which the gods really dwell, and they have intercourse with the gods by speech and prophecies and visions, ⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ [111c] and they see the sun and moon and stars as they really are, and in all other ways their blessedness is in accord with this. ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (111c–112a)

Such then is the nature of the earth as a whole, and of the things around it. But round about the whole earth, in the hollows of it, are many regions, some deeper and wider than that in which we live, ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ [111d] some deeper but with a narrower opening than ours, and some also less in depth and wider. Now all these are connected with one another by many subterranean channels, some larger and some smaller, which are bored in all of them, and there are passages through which much water flows from one to another as into mixing bowls; and there are everlasting rivers of huge size under the earth, flowing with hot and cold water; and there is much fire, and great rivers of fire, and many streams of mud, some thinner ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ [111e] and some thicker, like the rivers of mud that flow before the lava in Sicily, and the lava itself. These fill the various regions as they happen to flow to one or another at any time. Now a kind of oscillation within the earth moves all these up and down. And the

nature of the oscillation is as follows: One of the chasms of the earth is greater than the rest, ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ [112a] and is bored right through the whole earth; this is the one which Homer means when he says: “Far off, the lowest abyss beneath the earth; land which elsewhere he and many other poets have called Tartarus.” ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (112a–112c)

For all the rivers flow together into this chasm and flow out of it again, and they have each the nature of the earth through which they flow. And the reason why all the streams flow in and out here ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ [112b] is that this liquid matter has no bottom or foundation. So it oscillates and waves up and down, and the air and wind about it do the same; for they follow the liquid both when it moves toward the other side of the earth and when it moves toward this side, and just as the breath of those who breathe blows in and out, so the wind there oscillates with the liquid and causes terrible and irresistible blasts as it rushes in and out. ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ [112c] And when the water retires to the region which we call the lower, it flows into the rivers there and fills them up, as if it were pumped into them; and when it leaves that region and comes back to this side, it fills the rivers here; and when the streams are filled they flow through the passages and through the earth and come to the various places to which their different paths lead, where they make seas and marshes, and rivers and springs. ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (112c–113a)

Thence they go down again under the earth, ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ [112d] some passing around many great regions and others around fewer and smaller places, and flow again into Tartarus, some much below the point

where they were sucked out, and some only a little; but all flow in below their exit. Some flow in on the side from which they flowed out, others on the opposite side; and some pass completely around in a circle, coiling about the earth once or several times, like serpents, then descend to the lowest possible depth and fall again into the chasm. ⁽¹⁵¹⁾ [112e] Now it is possible to go down from each side to the center, but not beyond, for there the slope rises forward in front of the streams from either side of the earth. “Now these streams are many and great and of all sorts, but among the many are four streams, the greatest and outermost of which is that called Oceanus, which flows round in a circle, and opposite this, flowing in the opposite direction, is Acheron, which flows through ⁽¹⁵²⁾ [113a] various desert places and, passing under the earth, comes to the Acherusian lake. To this lake the souls of most of the dead go and, after remaining there the appointed time, which is for some longer and for others shorter, are sent back to be born again into living beings. The third river flows out between these two, and near the place whence it issues it falls into a vast region burning with a great fire and makes a lake larger than our Mediterranean sea, boiling with water and mud. ⁽¹⁵³⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (113b–113c)

[113b] Thence it flows in a circle, turbid and muddy, and comes in its winding course, among other places, to the edge of the Acherusian lake, but does not mingle with its water. Then, after winding about many times underground, it flows into Tartarus at a lower level. This is the river, which is called Pyriphlegethon, and the streams of lava which spout up at various places on earth are offshoots from it. Opposite this the fourth river issues, it is said, first into a wild and awful place, which is all of a dark blue color, like lapis lazuli ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ [113c] This is called the Stygian river, and the lake which it forms by flowing in is the Styx. And when the river has flowed

in here and has received fearful powers into its waters, it passes under the earth and, circling round in the direction opposed to that of Pyriphlegethon, it meets it coming from the other way in the Acherusian lake. And the water of this river also mingles with no other water, but this also passes round in a circle and falls into Tartarus opposite Pyriphlegethon. And the name of this river, as the Poets say, is Cocytus. ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (113d–114a)

[113d] “Such is the nature of these things. Now when the dead have come to the place where each is led by his genius, first they are judged and sentenced, as they have lived well and piously, or not. And those who are found to have lived neither well nor ill, go to the Acheron and, embarking upon vessels provided for them, arrive in them at the lake; there they dwell and are purified, and if they have done any wrong they are absolved by paying the penalty for their wrong doings ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ [113e] and for their good deeds they receive rewards, each according to his merits. But those who appear to be incurable, on account of the greatness of their wrongdoings, because they have committed many great deeds of sacrilege, or wicked and abominable murders, or any other such crimes, are cast by their fitting destiny into Tartarus, whence they never emerge. Those, however, who are curable, but are found to have committed great sins — who have, for example, in a moment of passion done some act of violence against father or mother and ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ [114a] have lived in repentance the rest of their lives, or who have slain some other person under similar conditions—these must needs be thrown into Tartarus, and when they have been there a year the wave casts them out, the homicides by way of Cocytus, those who have outraged their parents by way of Pyriphlegethon. ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (114a–114c)

And when they have been brought by the current to the Acherusian lake, they shout and cry out, calling to those whom they have slain or outraged, begging and beseeching them ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ [114b] to be gracious and to let them come out into the lake; and if they prevail they come out and cease from their ills, but if not, they are borne away again to Tartarus and thence back into the rivers, and this goes on until they prevail upon those whom they have wronged; for this is the penalty imposed upon them by the judges. But those who are found to have excelled in holy living are freed from these regions within the earth and are released as from prisons; ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ [114c] they mount upward into their pure abode and dwell upon the earth. And of these, all who have duly purified themselves by philosophy live henceforth altogether without bodies, and pass to still more beautiful abodes which it is not easy to describe, nor have we now time enough. ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (114c–114e)

“But, Simmias, because of all these things which we have recounted we ought to do our best to acquire virtue and wisdom in life. For the prize is fair and the hope great. ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ [114d] “Now it would not be fitting for a man of sense to maintain that all this is just as I have described it, but that this or something like it is true concerning our souls and their abodes, since the soul is shown to be immortal, I think he may properly and worthily venture to believe; for the venture is well worth while; and he ought to repeat such things to himself as if they were magic charms, which is the reason why I have been lengthening out the story so long. This then is why a man should be of good cheer about his soul, who in his life ⁽¹⁶¹⁾ [114e] has rejected the pleasures and ornaments of the body, thinking they

are alien to him and more likely to do him harm than good, and has sought eagerly for those of learning, and after adorning his soul with no alien ornaments, but with its own proper adornment of self-restraint and justice and ⁽¹⁶²⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (115a–115c)

[115a] courage and freedom and truth, awaits his departure to the other world, ready to go when fate calls him. You, Simmias and Cebes and the rest,” he said, “will go hereafter, each in his own time; but I am now already, as a tragedian would say, called by fate, and it is about time for me to go to the bath; for I think it is better to bathe before drinking the poison, that the women may not have the trouble of bathing the corpse.”

When he had finished speaking, Crito said: ⁽¹⁶³⁾

[115b] “Well, Socrates, do you wish to leave any directions with us about your children or anything else – anything we can do to serve you?”

“What I always say, Crito,” he replied, “nothing new. If you take care of yourselves you will serve me and mine and yourselves, whatever you do, even if you make no promises now; but if you neglect yourselves and are not willing to live following step by step, as it were, in the path marked out by our present and past discussions, you will accomplish nothing, ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ [115c] no matter how much or how eagerly you promise at present.”

“We will certainly try hard to do as you say,” he replied. “But how shall we bury you?” ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (115c–115e)

“However you please,” he replied, “if you can catch me and I do not

get away from you.” And he laughed gently, and looking towards us, said: “I cannot persuade Crito, my friends, that the Socrates who is now conversing and arranging the details of his argument is really I; he thinks I am the one whom he will presently see as a corpse,⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ [115d] and he asks how to bury me. And though I have been saying at great length that after I drink the poison I shall no longer be with you, but shall go away to the joys of the blessed you know of, he seems to think that was idle talk uttered to encourage you and myself. So,” he said, “give security for me to Crito, the opposite of that which he gave the judges at my trial; for he gave security that I would remain, but you must give security that I shall not remain when I die,⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ [115e] but shall go away, so that Crito may bear it more easily, and may not be troubled when he sees my body being burnt or buried, or think I am undergoing terrible treatment, and may not say at the funeral that he is laying out Socrates, or following him to the grave, or burying him.”⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (115c–116c)

For, dear Crito, you may be sure that such wrong words are not only undesirable in themselves, but they infect the soul with evil. No, you must be of good courage, and say that you bury my body – and bury it⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ [116a] as you think best and as seems to you most fitting.” When he had said this, he got up and went into another room to bathe; Crito followed him, but he told us to wait. So we waited, talking over with each other and discussing the discourse we had heard, and then speaking of the great misfortune that had befallen us, for we felt that he was like a father to us and that when bereft of him we should pass the rest of our lives as orphans. And when he had bathed⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ [116b] and his children had been brought to him – for he had two little sons and one big one – and the women of the family had come, he talked with them in Crito’s presence and gave them such directions as he wished; then he told the women to

go away, and he came to us. And it was now nearly sunset; for he had spent a long time within. And he came and sat down fresh from the bath. After that not much was said, and the servant ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ [116c] of the eleven came and stood beside him and said: "Socrates, I shall not find fault with you, as I do with others, for being angry and cursing me, when at the behest of the authorities, I tell them to drink the poison." ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (116c–116d)

No, I have found you in all this time in every way the noblest and gentlest and best man who has ever come here, and now I know your anger is directed against others, not against me, for you know who are blame. Now, for you know the message I came to bring you, farewell and try to bear what you must ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ [116d] as easily as you can." And he burst into tears and turned and went away. And Socrates looked up at him and said: "Fare you well, too; I will do as you say." And then he said to us: "How charming the man is! Ever since I have been here he has been coming to see me and talking with me from time to time, and has been the best of men, and now how nobly he weeps for me! But come, Crito, let us obey him, and let someone bring the poison, if it is ready; and if not, let the man prepare it." And Crito said: ⁽¹⁷¹⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (116e–117b)

[116e] "But I think, Socrates, the sun is still upon the mountains and has not yet set; and I know that others have taken the poison very late, after the order has come to them, and in the meantime have eaten and drunk and some of them enjoyed the society of those whom they loved. Do not hurry; for there is still time."

And Socrates said: “Crito, those whom you mention are right in doing as they do, for they think they gain by it; and I shall be right in not doing as they do; ⁽¹⁷²⁾

[117a] for I think I should gain nothing by taking the poison a little later. I should only make myself ridiculous in my own eyes if I clung to life and spared it, when there is no more profit in it. Come,” he said, “do as I ask and do not refuse.”

Thereupon Crito nodded to the boy who was standing near. The boy went out and stayed a long time, then came back with the man who was to administer the poison, which he brought with him in a cup ready for use. And when Socrates saw him, he said: “Well, my good man, you know about these things; what must I do?” “Nothing,” he replied, “except drink the poison and walk about ⁽¹⁷³⁾ [117b] till your legs feel heavy; then lie down, and the poison will take effect of itself.” ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (117b–117e)

At the same time he held out the cup to Socrates. He took it, and very gently, Echecrates, without trembling or changing color or expression, but looking up at the man with wide open eyes, as was his custom, said: “What do you say about pouring a libation to some deity from this cup? May I, or not?” “Socrates,” said he, “we prepare only as much as we think is enough.” “I understand,” said Socrates ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ [117c] “but I may and must pray to the gods that my departure hence be a fortunate one; so I offer this prayer, and may it be granted.” With these words he raised the cup to his lips and very cheerfully and quietly drained it. Up to that time most of us had been able to restrain our tears fairly well, but when we watched him drinking and saw that he had drunk the poison, we could do so no longer, but in spite of myself my tears rolled down in floods, so that I wrapped my face in my cloak and wept for myself; for it was not for him that I wept, ⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ [117d] but for my own

misfortune in being deprived of such a friend. Crito had got up and gone away even before I did, because he could not restrain his tears. But Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time before, then wailed aloud in his grief and made us all break down, except Socrates himself. But he said, “What conduct is this, you strange men! I sent the women away chiefly for this very reason, that they might not behave in this absurd way; for I have heard that ⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ [117e] it is best to die in silence. ⁽¹⁷⁷⁾

The Last Conversation Of Socrates (117e–118a)

Keep quiet and be brave.” Then we were ashamed and controlled our tears. He walked about and, when he said his legs were heavy, lay down on his back, for such was the advice of the attendant. The man who had administered the poison laid his hands on him and after a while examined his feet and legs, then pinched his foot hard and asked if he felt it. He said “No”; then after that, ⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ [118a] his thighs; and passing upwards in this way he showed us that he was growing cold and rigid. And again he touched him and said that when it reached his heart, he would be gone. The chill had now reached the region about the groin, and uncovering his face, which had been covered, he said — and these were his last words — **“Crito, we owe a cock to Aesculapius. Pay it and do not neglect it.”** “That,” said Crito, “shall be done; but see if you have anything else to say.” To this question he made no reply, but after a little while he moved; the attendant uncovered him; his eyes were fixed. And Crito when he saw it, closed his mouth and eyes.

Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend, who was, as we may say, of all those of his time whom we have known, the best and wisest and most righteous man. ⁽¹⁷⁸⁾

37. Boethius

Boethius Summary

Boethius' complaint (Song I.).

Chapter I — Philosophy appears to Boethius, drives away the Muses of Poetry, and herself laments (Song II.) the disordered condition of his mind.

Chapter II — Boethius is speechless with amazement. Philosophy wipes away the tears that have clouded his eyesight.

Chapter III — **Boethius recognizes his physician Philosophy.** To his wondering inquiries she explains her presence, and recalls to his mind the persecutions to which Philosophy has oftentimes from of old been subjected by an ignorant world.

Chapter IV — **Philosophy bids Boethius declare his griefs. He relates the story of his unjust accusation and ruin.** He concludes with a prayer (Song V.) that the moral disorder in human affairs may be set right.

Chapter V — **Philosophy admits the justice of Boethius' self-vindication, but grieves rather for the unhappy change in his mind. She will first tranquillize his spirit by soothing remedies.**

Chapter VI — **Philosophy tests Boethius' mental state by certain questions, and discovers three chief causes of his soul's sickness:**

1. **He has forgotten his own true nature;**
2. **He knows not the end towards which the whole universe tends;**
3. **He knows not the means by which the world is governed.** ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Excerpt: Book I



Figure 6.1: [G. Reisch, Margarita Philosophica](#) by Wellcome Collection gallery is licensed under [CC-BY-4.0](#)

While I was thus mutely pondering within myself, and recording

my sorrowful complaining with my pen, it seemed to me that **there appeared above my head a woman of a countenance exceeding venerable. Her eyes were bright as fire, and of a more than human keenness; her complexion was lively, her vigor showed no trace of enfeeblement; and yet her years were right full, and she plainly seemed not of our age and time. Her stature was difficult to judge. At one moment it exceeded not the common height, at another her forehead seemed to strike the sky; and whenever she raised her head higher, she began to pierce within the very heavens, and to baffle the eyes of them that looked upon her. Her garments were of an imperishable fabric, wrought with the finest threads and of the most delicate workmanship; and these, as her own lips afterwards assured me, she had herself woven with her own hands.**

The beauty of this vesture had been somewhat tarnished by age and neglect, and wore that dingy look which marble contracts from exposure. On the lower-most edge was in woven the Greek letter Π [Greek: P], on the topmost the letter Θ (Greek: Theta), and between the two were to be seen steps, like a staircase, from the lower to the upper letter. This robe, moreover, had been torn by the hands of violent persons, who had each snatched away what he could clutch. Her right hand held a note-book; in her left she bore a staff.

And **when she saw the Muses of Poetry standing by my bedside** , dictating the words of my lamentations, she was moved awhile to wrath, and her eyes flashed sternly. ‘Who,’ said she, ‘has allowed yon play-acting wantons to approach this sick man — these who, so far from giving medicine to heal his malady, even feed it with sweet poison? These it is who kill the rich crop of reason with the barren thorns of passion, who accustom men’s minds to disease, instead of setting them free. Now, were it some common man whom your allurements were seducing, as is usually your way, I should be less indignant. On such a one I should not have spent my pains for naught. But this is one nurtured in the Eleatic and Academic

philosophies. **Nay, get ye gone, ye sirens, whose sweetness lasted not; leave him for my muses to tend and heal!**

At these words of upbraiding, the whole band, in deepened sadness, with downcast eyes, and blushes that confessed their shame, dolefully left the chamber. 'But the time,' said she, 'calls rather for healing than for lamentation.' Then, with her eyes bent full upon me, 'Art thou that man,' she cries, 'who, erstwhile fed with the milk and reared upon the nourishment which is mine to give, had grown up to the full vigour of a manly spirit? And yet I had bestowed such armour on thee as would have proved an invincible defence, hadst thou not first cast it away. Dost thou know me? Why art thou silent? Is it shame or amazement that hath struck thee dumb? Would it were shame; but, as I see, a stupor hath seized upon thee.'

Then, when she saw me not only answering nothing, but mute and utterly incapable of speech, she gently touched my breast with her hand, and said: 'There is no danger; these are the symptoms of lethargy, the usual sickness of deluded minds. For awhile he has forgotten himself; he will easily recover his memory, if only he first recognises me. And that he may do so, let me now wipe his eyes that are clouded with a mist of mortal things.' Thereat, with a fold of her robe, she dried my eyes all swimming with tears.

But I, because my sight was dimmed with much weeping, and I could not tell who was this woman of authority so commanding – I was dumfounded, and, with my gaze fastened on the earth, continued silently to await what she might do next. Then she drew near me and sat on the edge of my couch, and, looking into my face all heavy with grief and fixed in sadness on the ground, she bewailed in these words the disorder of my mind:

Even so the clouds of my melancholy were broken up. I saw the clear sky, and regained the power to recognise the face of my physician. Accordingly, when I had lifted my eyes and fixed my gaze upon her, I beheld my nurse, Philosophy, whose halls I had frequented from my youth up.

'Ah! why,' I cried, 'mistress of all excellence, hast thou come

down from on high, and entered the solitude of this my exile? Is it that thou, too, even as I, mayst be persecuted with false accusations?’

‘Could I desert thee, child,’ said she, ‘and not lighten the burden which thou hast taken upon thee through the hatred of my name, by sharing this trouble? Even forgetting that it were not lawful for Philosophy to leave companionless the way of the innocent, should I, thinkest thou, fear to incur reproach, or shrink from it, as though some strange new thing had befallen? Thinkest thou that now, for the first time in an evil age, Wisdom hath been assailed by peril? Did I not often in days of old, before my servant Plato lived, wage stern warfare with the rashness of folly? In his lifetime, too, Socrates, his master, won with my aid the victory of an unjust death.’

And when, one after the other, **the Epicurean herd, the Stoic** , and the rest, each of them as far as in them lay, went about to seize the heritage he left, and were dragging me off protesting and resisting, as their booty, they tore in pieces the garment which I had woven with my own hands, and, clutching the torn pieces, went off, believing that the whole of me had passed into their possession. And some of them, because some traces of my vesture were seen upon them, were destroyed through the mistake of the lewd multitude, who falsely deemed them to be my disciples.

It may be thou knowest not of the banishment of Anaxagoras, of the poison draught of Socrates, nor of Zeno’s torturing , because these things happened in a distant country; yet mightest thou have learnt the **fate of Arrius, of Seneca, of Soranus, whose stories are neither old nor unknown to fame. These men were brought to destruction for no other reason than that, settled as they were in my principles, their lives were a manifest contrast to the ways of the wicked.**

So there is nothing thou should wonder at, if on the seas of this life we are tossed by storm-blasts, seeing that we have made it our chiefest aim to refuse compliance with evil-doers. And though, maybe, the host of the wicked is many in number, yet is it

contemptible, since it is under no leadership, but is hurried hither and thither at the blind driving of mad error.

And if at times and seasons they set in array against us, and fall on in overwhelming strength, our leader draws off her forces into the citadel while they are busy plundering the useless baggage. But we from our vantage ground, safe from all this wild work, laugh to see them making prize of the most valueless of things, protected by a bulwark which aggressive folly may not aspire to reach.

...’ **Now,** said she, **‘I know another cause of thy disease, one, too, of grave moment. Thou hast ceased to know thy own nature. So, then, I have made full discovery both of the causes of thy sickness and the means of restoring thy health.** It is because forgetfulness of thyself hath bewildered thy mind that thou hast bewailed thee as an exile, as one stripped of the blessings that were his; **it is because thou know not the end of existence that thou deem abominable and wicked men to be happy and powerful; while, because thou hast forgotten by what means the earth is governed, thou deem that fortune’s changes ebb and flow without the restraint of a guiding hand.** These are serious enough to cause not sickness only, but even death; but, thanks be to the Author of our health, the light of nature hath not yet left thee utterly.’

In thy true judgment concerning the world’s government, in that thou believed it subject, not to the random drift of chance, but to divine reason, we have the divine spark from which thy recovery may be hoped. Have, then, no fear; from these weak embers the vital heat shall once more be kindled within thee. But seeing that it is not yet time for strong remedies, and that the mind is manifestly so constituted that when it casts off true opinions it straightway puts on false, wherefrom arises a cloud of confusion that disturbs its true vision, I will now try and disperse these mists by mild and soothing application, that so the darkness of misleading passion may be scattered, and thou may come to discern the splendor of the true light.’⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Book II — The Vanity of Fortune's Gifts

Summary

Chapter I — Philosophy reproves Boethius for the foolishness of his complaints against Fortune. Her very nature is caprice.

Chapter II — Philosophy in Fortune's name replies to Boethius' reproaches, and proves that the gifts of Fortune are hers to give and to take away.

Chapter III — Boethius falls back upon his present sense of misery. Philosophy reminds him of the brilliancy of his former fortunes.

Chapter IV — Boethius objects that the memory of past happiness is the bitterest portion of the lot of the unhappy. Philosophy shows that much is still left for which he may be thankful. None enjoy perfect satisfaction with their lot. But happiness depends not on anything which Fortune can give. It is to be sought within.

Chapter V — All the gifts of Fortune are external; they can never truly be our own. Man cannot find his good in worldly possessions. Riches bring anxiety and trouble.

Chapter VI — High place without virtue is an evil, not a good. Power is an empty name.

Chapter VII — Fame is a thing of little account when compared with the immensity of the Universe and the endlessness of Time.

Chapter VIII — One service only can Fortune do, when she reveals her own nature and distinguishes true friends from false. ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Excerpt from Philosophia's Speech: Book II . I

Thereafter for a while she remained silent; and when she had restored my flagging attention by a moderate pause in her discourse, **she thus began: If I have thoroughly ascertained the**

character and causes of thy sickness, thou art pining with regretful longing for thy former fortune. It is the change, as thou deem, of this fortune that hath so wrought upon thy mind. Well do I understand that Siren's manifold wiles, the fatal charm of the friendship she pretends for her victims, so long as she is scheming to entrap them—how she unexpectedly abandons them and leaves them overwhelmed with insupportable grief. Bethink thee of her nature, character, and deserts, and thou wilt soon acknowledge that in her thou hast neither possessed, nor hast thou lost, aught of any worth.

Methinks I need not spend much pains in bringing this to thy mind, since, even when she was still with thee, even while she was caressing thee, thou used to assail her in manly terms, to rebuke her, with maxims drawn from my holy treasure-house. But all sudden changes of circumstances bring inevitably a certain commotion of spirit. Thus it hath come to pass that thou also for awhile hast been parted from thy mind's tranquility. **But it is time for thee to take and drain a draught, soft and pleasant to the taste, which, as it penetrates within, may prepare the way for stronger potions. Wherefore I call to my aid the sweet persuasiveness of Rhetoric, who then only walk in the right way when she forsakes not my instructions, and Music, my handmaid, I bid to join with her singing, now in lighter, now in graver strain.** ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Book III — True Happiness and False

Summary

Chapter I — Boethius beseeches Philosophy to continue. She promises to lead him to true happiness.

Chapter II — Happiness is the one end which all created beings seek. They aim variously at (a) wealth, or (b) rank, or (c) sovereignty,

or (d) glory, or (e) pleasure, because they think thereby to attain either (a) contentment, (b) reverence, (c) power, (d) renown, or (e) gladness of heart, in one or other of which they severally imagine happiness to consist.

Chapter III – Philosophy proceeds to consider whether happiness can really be secured in any of these ways, (a) So far from bringing contentment, riches only add to men's wants.

Chapter IV – (b) High position cannot of itself win respect. Titles command no reverence in distant and barbarous lands. They even fall into contempt through lapse of time.

Chapter V – (c) Sovereignty cannot even bestow safety. History tells of the downfall of kings and their ministers. Tyrants go in fear of their lives.

Chapter VI – (d) Fame conferred on the unworthy is but disgrace. The splendor of noble birth is not a man's own, but his ancestors.

Chapter VII – (e) Pleasure begins in the restlessness of desire, and ends in repentance. Even the pure pleasures of home may turn to gall and bitterness.

Chapter VIII – All fail, then, to give what they promise. There is, moreover, some accompanying evil involved in each of these aims. Beauty and bodily strength are likewise of little worth. In strength man is surpassed by the brutes; beauty is but outward show.

Chapter IX – The source of men's error in following these phantoms of good is that they break up and separate that which is in its nature one and indivisible. Contentment, power, reverence, renown, and joy are essentially bound up one with the other, and, if they are to be attained at all, must be attained together. True happiness, if it can be found, will include them all. But it cannot be found among the perishable things hitherto considered.

Chapter X – **Such a happiness necessarily exists. Its seat is in God. Nay, God is very happiness, and in a manner, therefore, the happy man partakes also of the Divine nature. All other ends are relative to this good, since they are all pursued only for the sake of good; it is good which the sole ultimate end is. And since the sole**

end is also happiness, it is plain that this good and happiness are in essence the same.

Chapter XI — Unity is another aspect of goodness. Now, all things subsist so long only as they preserve the unity of their being; when they lose this unity, they perish. But the bent of nature forces all things (plants and inanimate things, as well as animals) to strive to continue in life. Therefore, all things desire unity, for unity is essential to life. But unity and goodness were shown to be the same. Therefore, good is proved to be the end towards which the whole universe tends.

Chapter XII — Boethius acknowledges that he is but recollecting truths he once knew. Philosophy goes on to show that it is goodness also by which the whole world is governed. Boethius professes compunction for his former folly. But the paradox of evil is introduced, and he is once more perplexed. ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Excerpt from Philosophia's Speech: Book III.XII

For, truly, a little before thou didst begin with happiness, and say it was the supreme good, and didst declare it to be seated in the supreme Godhead. **God Himself, too, thou didst affirm to be supreme good and all-complete happiness; and from this thou didst go on to add, as by the way, the proof that no one would be happy unless he were likewise God.** Again, thou didst say that the very form of good was the essence both of God and of happiness, and **didst teach that the absolute One was the absolute good which was sought by universal nature .**

Thou didst maintain, also, that God rules the universe by the governance of goodness that all things obey Him willingly, and that evil has no existence in nature. And all this thou didst unfold without the help of assumptions from without, but by inherent and proper proofs, drawing credence one from the other.'

Then answered she: "Far is it from me to mock thee; nay, by

the blessing of God, whom we lately addressed in prayer, we have achieved the most important of all objects. For such is the form of the Divine essence, that neither can it pass into things external, nor take up anything external into itself; but, as Parmenides says of it,

“In body like to a sphere on all sides perfectly rounded,”

it rolls the restless orb of the universe, keeping itself motionless the while. And if I have also employed reasonings not drawn from without, but lying within the compass of our subject, there is no cause for thee to marvel, since thou hast learnt on Plato’s authority that words ought to be akin to the matter of which they treat.” ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Book IV — Good and Ill Fortune

Summary

Chapter I — The mystery of the seeming moral confusion. Philosophy engages to make this plain, and to fulfil her former promise to the full.

Chapter II — Accordingly, (a) she first expounds the paradox that **the good alone have power, the bad are altogether powerless.**

Chapter III — (b) The righteous never lack their reward, nor the wicked their punishment.

Chapter IV — (c) The wicked are more unhappy when they accomplish their desires than when they fail to attain them. (d) Evil-doers are more fortunate when they expiate their crimes by suffering punishment than when they escape unpunished. (e) The wrong-doer is more wretched than he who suffers injury.

Chapter V — **Boethius still cannot understand why the distribution of happiness and misery to the righteous and the wicked seems the result of chance. Philosophy replies that this only seems so because we do not understand the principles of God’s moral governance.**

Chapter VI — The distinction of Fate and Providence. **The apparent moral confusion is due to our ignorance of the secret counsels of God's providence. If we possessed the key, we should see how all things are guided to good.**

Chapter VII — **Thus all fortune is good fortune; for it either rewards, disciplines, amends, or punishes, and so is either useful or just.** ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Book V — Free Will and God's Foreknowledge

Summary

Chapter I — Boethius asks if there is really any such thing as chance. Philosophy answers, in conformity with Aristotle's definition (Phys., II. iv.), that **chance is merely relative to human purpose, and that what seems fortuitous really depends on a more subtle form of causation.**

Chapter II — Has man, then, any freedom, if the reign of law is thus absolute? **Freedom of choice, replies Philosophy, is a necessary attribute of reason.** Man has a measure of freedom, though a less perfect freedom than divine natures.

Chapter III — But how can man's freedom be reconciled with God's absolute foreknowledge? If God's foreknowledge be certain, it seems to exclude the possibility of man's free will. But if man has no freedom of choice, it follows that rewards and punishments are unjust as well as useless; that merit and demerit are mere names; that God is the cause of men's wickednesses; that prayer is meaningless.

Chapter IV — The explanation is that man's reasoning faculties are not adequate to the apprehension of the ways of God's foreknowledge. If we could know, as He knows, all that is most perplexing in this problem would be made plain. **For knowledge**

depends not on the nature of the thing known, but on the faculty of the knower.

Chapter V — Now, where our senses conflict with our reason, we defer the judgment of the lower faculty to the judgment of the higher. **Our present perplexity arises from our viewing God's foreknowledge from the standpoint of human reason. We must try and rise to the higher standpoint of God's immediate intuition.**

Chapter VI — **To understand this higher form of cognition, we must consider God's nature. God is eternal. Eternity is more than mere everlasting duration. Accordingly, His knowledge surveys past and future in the timelessness of an eternal present. His foreseeing is seeing. Yet this foreseeing does not in itself impose necessity, any more than our seeing things happen makes their happening necessary. We may, however, if we please, distinguish two necessities — one absolute, the other conditional on knowledge. In this conditional sense alone do the things which God foresees necessarily come to pass. But this kind of necessity affects not the nature of things. It leaves the reality of free will unimpaired, and the evils feared do not ensue. Our responsibility is great, since all that we do is done in the sight of all-seeing Providence.** ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

PART VIII

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