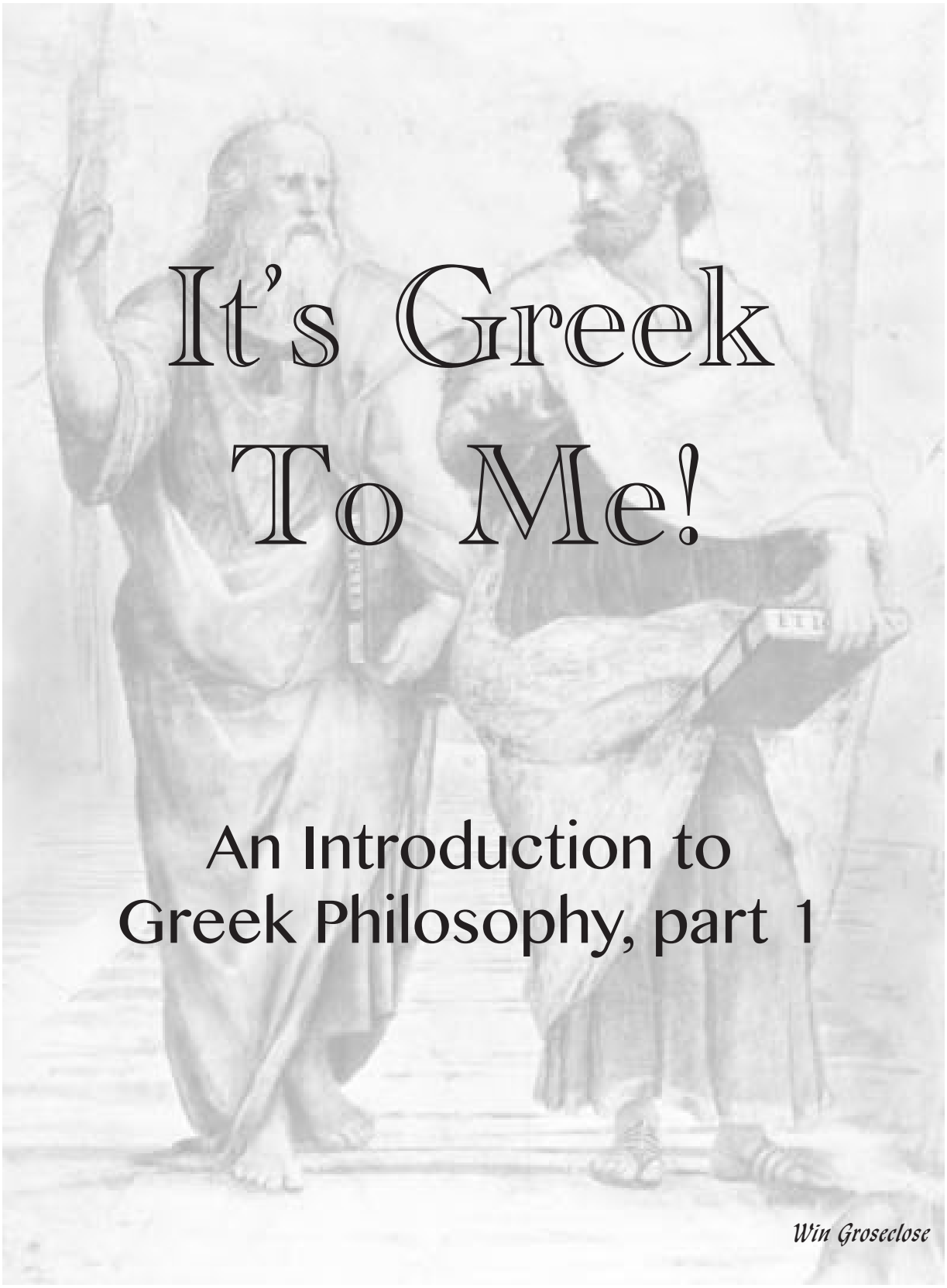

It's Greek To Me!

An Introduction to Greek Philosophy, part 1

Win Groseclose

"Jerusalem and Athens"
Chapter 1: Introduction

Around AD 200, one of the important church leaders of the day was a man by the name of Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (yeah, that's a mouthful!), better known to us as Tertullian. In Tertullian's day, the church leaders were trying to figure out whether Greek philosophy and logic really had any place within Christian thought. Tertullian's question was: "What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?"

You see, the Christian religion has its origins in Jerusalem and in the Jewish faith. Greek philosophy has its origins in Athens and in the pagan ideas of people like Plato and Aristotle. Tertullian just could not understand how one could have anything to do with the other. God gave the Bible to the Christians; the pagans only had their own reason and imaginations!

We might be tempted to say, with Tertullian, that there is nothing but foolishness coming from Athens, but that doesn't seem to be the approach that the Apostle Paul took when he was evangelizing in Athens. When in Athens, Paul conversed with the Stoics and the Epicureans[1], he was aware of their worship of the "unknown god"[2], and he quoted from the Greek poets, Epimenides[3] and Aratus.[4] Clearly, Paul had a good working knowledge of the Greek thinkers of his day and knew how to use their thoughts to apply truth. God offers his "common grace"[5] to all peoples, this even the pagans come to correct conclusions at times.

So, what does Jerusalem have do do with Athens? God's people ought to understand the thought of the ancient Greeks for several reasons:

1. The Greeks created a system of logic that is useful in understanding the world. Note that the Greeks did not create logic itself; God created logic. The Greeks just organized how to think about things logically in a way that is still used in the western world.
2. The Greeks get many things wrong, but what they get right is often useful in defending the truth of the Biblical faith.
3. The influence of Greek thought on the western world is so profound that without an understanding of Greek thought, it can be said that we cannot understand modern thought.
4. An understanding of Greek thought is the basis for the understanding of pretty much every philosopher through history, Christian or otherwise. Solomon said that there was nothing

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[1]Acts 17:18.

[2]Acts 17:23.

[3]Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12

[4]Acts 17:28

[5]Common grace are those good things that believers and unbelievers both enjoy – God gives rain to the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:45).

new under the sun[6], and indeed, history demonstrates Solomon's teaching because pretty much every philosophical idea can be traced back to one of the Greeks.

5. If you want to evangelize the Greeks (in thought), then, like the Apostle Paul, you need to understand the Greeks.

What is Philosophy, then?

Literally, the word "Philosophy" means, "the love of wisdom." It comes from two Greek words, "*philos"* and *"sophia."* In Greek, "*philos"* refers to a kind of brotherly love. It is different than the sacrificial love that Christ demonstrates to us[7] but it is also a stronger kind of love than one might express for parents of family members. *"Sophia"* or "*sophos"* refers to wise actions.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "wisdom"[8] is found 171 times, 42 of which are not surprisingly found in the book of Proverbs. In the New Testament, the word for wisdom is used 51 times (17 of which are found in 1 Corinthians). Given the frequent use of this word, should not surprise us that the Bible has a lot to say about wisdom and even why we ought to love it in a brotherly kind of way.

How do we gain wisdom?

The Bible is quite clear that wisdom begins with the Fear of the Lord.[9] In fact, the scriptures go as far as to say that the "Fear of the Lord" is wisdom.[10] Thus, as we approach philosophy, we need to remember to approach philosophy from the right starting point. For the Greeks, philosophy's purpose was a pursuit of knowledge about the world around us. For the Christian, philosophy does gain us knowledge about the world around us, but that knowledge ought to make us love and revere our God all the more.

Four Major Philosophers

While there are many philosophers that are important, there are four that rise to the top as the greatest of the greatest human philosophers. The first two are Greek and the last two are Christian. The Greeks are Plato and Aristotle. We will talk more about these two men later on in our survey. The Christians are St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Interestingly enough,

[6]Ecclesiastes 1:9.

[7]That sacrificial love of Christ is the Greek word, "*agape."*

[8]The Hebrew word for wisdom is "khokmah."

[9]Proverbs 9:10, Psalm 111:10.

[10]Job 28:28.

Augustine took the ideas of Plato and adapted them into a Christian worldview. Aquinas took the writings of Aristotle and did the same. Thus we hear the words of Solomon once again that there is "nothing new under the sun."

Greek Philosophy begins...

It has been said that the history of philosophy begins on May 28th, 585 BC at 6:13 PM. How do we know such a thing as this? Back then, there was a man by the name of Thales (624-546 BC). Thales was amongst the first of the Greeks to try and explain natural events without appealing to stories about the gods. And on this date above, Thales correctly predicted an eclipse of the sun.

Thales was also a mathematician, and applied the use of geometry to determine the heights of pyramids and natural objects. He also was the first to argue that all matter was composed (at its very essence) of a single kind of "stuff." This view is called "monism" and will be a view that will dominate Greek philosophy for many years. We will talk more about monism in the next chapter, but let it be said that for Thales, the essential element was water.

Thales did not just use his knowledge in an abstract way. Aristotle records a time where Thales predicted that the weather would be particularly good for growing olives. Thus, Thales bought up all of the olive presses in the city so that when the olive harvest came in, he could rent them to the harvesters at high prices ... the first scientific capitalist.

And so we begin...a prediction of an eclipse and of olive harvests...and more to come...

Questions for Review:

1. What does the word "Philosophy" mean? _____

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2. What is the beginning of wisdom? _____

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3. What is the difference between the end goals of the Greek search for Wisdom and the Christian search for wisdom? _____

_____

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4. Who was Thales and what did he predict? _____

_____

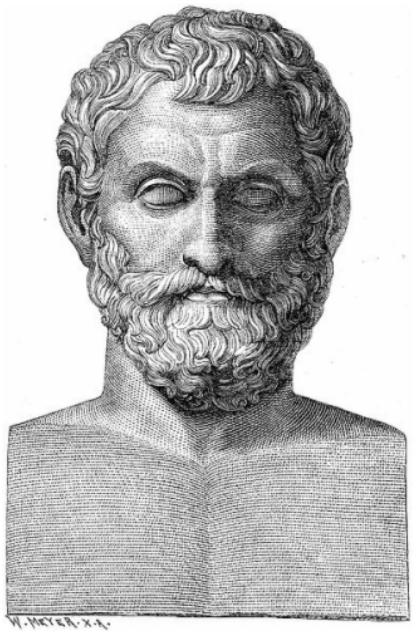
_____

5. What does the word "monism" mean? _____

Many people are surprised to hear that Greek philosophy did not begin in mainland Greece, but instead began in the Greek colonies. We have already been introduced to the earliest group of such philosophers in the person of Thales, but they began in southwestern Asia-Minor in the group of colonies known to the Greeks as Ionia. More specifically, all of these early philosophers lived in or near the city of Miletus.[11]

The first was Thales, the second is Anaximander (610-547 BC), and the third is Anaximenes (585 - 528 BC). The philosophy of these three individuals can be summed up with four words: Naturalism, Materialism, Monism, Hylozoism.

Anaximander



Naturalism

Naturalism is the view that all that exists is nature and that all things that happen can be explained without the reference to a supernatural being. A naturalist can believe in a god of a certain kind, so long as the god is contained within the natural order...much like the greek gods of mythology. These gods, though, are unnecessary. The sad thing is that there are still many people in the world today that are naturalists, many of whom are also materialists (see below).

Materialism

Many people confuse Naturalism with Materialism. While the naturalist can allow for the spiritual so long as the spiritual things are part of the natural order, the materialist takes things one step further and argues that matter is all that exists. If it is not physical, it does not exist.

Monism

This is the view that everything in the world is ultimately made out of one kind of "stuff." In the ancient world there were a lot of different opinions as to what that "stuff" was — we have already seen that Thales thought that everything was made from water.[12] Most materialists today will recognize that there are various kinds of basic matter, yet those holding to the big-bang theory

[11]Miletus is a city of Biblical significance, see Acts 20:15,17 and 2 Timothy 4:20.

[12]The term that these philosophers used to describe the "essential" stuff was "*arche."* It should be noted that at this time in history, people understood there to be four basic elements: air, earth, water, and fire. Of these four, Thales viewed water as the most basic.

of origins on some level must be monists, arguing that all matter that is originated in a singularity.[13]

Hylozoism

How's that for a vocabulary word? This word is essentially a combination of two Greek words, "*Hule",* which means "matter" and "*Zoe"* which means "life." Essentially it is the belief that all matter is alive. For example, they recognized that a magnet attracts iron to itself...they explained the movement or the attraction by saying that the magnet was alive and thus pulling the metal toward itself.

Anaximander

Unlike Thales, Anaximander believed that there was an even more basic element than water, air, earth, or fire. This element he called the "*aperome*" or the "boundless." This, he believed, was an invisible element that had no identifiable features but would simply form other elements like air, water, earth, or fire. It should be noted that this view was not entirely dismissed in history. Aristotle would take a similar view and even the English philosopher, John Locke (AD 1632-1704), one of the most influential thinkers during the Enlightenment, held that there was a basic, formless, shapeless "stuff" that is the basis of everything else.

It was also Anaximander's belief that the *aperome* was constantly changing and combining to form new things, an early view of the modern evolutionary position...once again, the words of Solomon echo in our ears..."there is nothing new under the sun."

Anaximenes

Anaximenes, contrary to Thales, believed that the most basic element was air and that all matter was formed by air becoming either more or less dense. To explain this change in matter due to a change in density, he developed a theory of "condensation and rarefaction." Condensation describes the way air becomes "thicker" as it gets more compact (to become water or earth) and rarefaction describes how it becomes thinner (to become clouds or fire). These terms are still used by scientists today to explain the change in matter due to a change in density, though scientists no longer assume that all things are made of air.

Ephesus

About 20 miles from Miletus is the city of Ephesus, again a city that plays an important role in Biblical history. Just outside of Ephesus lived one more philosopher that is classified as an Ionian: Heraclitus (535-475 BC). Heraclitus was known by the people of Ephesus as "The Dark One." Little is known about the man apart from the fact that he hated the people of Ephesus and

[13]A singularity is a point in space with mass but no volume...essentially made up of pure energy, which was converted to mass.

the people of Ephesus hated him (hence he lived outside of the city limits), but his teachings are more well known and very important to Greek thought.

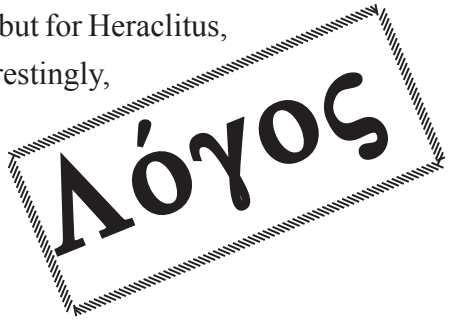
"You can never step into the same river twice..."

Heraclitus believed that everything was in motion and thus, everything is in a state of change. Thus his famous statement that you can never step into the same river twice. If you dip your foot in the river and then lift it out, by the time you dip your foot in again, the water has moved downstream. Thus, when you dip your foot back into the river it is a different river (different molecules of water) that you dip your foot into. But for Heraclitus, change was not limited to rivers or things that are obviously in motion, for Heraclitus, everything was constantly in a state of change.

The Logos

As Christians, the idea of "Logos" ought to be familiar to us. Literally, "*logos"* is the Greek word for "Word"[14] and the Apostle John begins his gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the Word..." or "In the beginning was the Logos." Jesus is the Logos of which John speaks.

Heraclitus was the first philosopher to take the idea of Logos and to create systematic or philosophic use around the term. Others would follow him in this, but for Heraclitus, the Logos was the principle of change that governed all things. Interestingly, for Heraclitus, the only thing that does not change is the principle of change itself, thus the idea of Logos was unchanging.



Questions for Review:

Please define:

Naturalism: _____

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Materialism: _____

_____

Monism: _____

_____

Hylozoism: _____

_____

[14]"Word" is the most common use of the word "logos," but depending on context, it can also mean "law", "matter", or "principle." It is also the root word of the word "logic."

Rarifaction & Condensation: _____

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Logos (for Heraclitus): _____

_____

"Don't Eat Beans!"
Chapter 3: The Pythagoreans

We now move from the Ionian colonies in Asia Minor to the city of Croton in southern Italy. We do not know a lot about the man named Pythagoras apart from the fact that he was born on the island of Samos around 570 BC. Even so, we know a great deal about the school that he founded after he arrived in Croton.

Unlike the previous philosophers that we have studied, this school of thought founded by Pythagoras was as much a religious sect as it was a school of thinkers. Thus, one's commitment to the school of thought was not just an intellectual commitment, but it was a physical and spiritual commitment as well.

Dualism

The Pythagoreans were the first to teach that there was a body/soul dualism, a view that separated them from the monists that were dominant in Ionia. They held that the body was corruptible and mortal and thus was the source of evil. The soul is immortal and thus contains that which is good and noble about our character. This dualism, they applied to all areas of the world, thus everything physical also had a form (or structure). This form, for Pythagoras, was best understood as a series of numbers. Thus, as one understands mathematics, one can best understand the perfect form that matter should take.

Purifying the Soul

The goal of the Pythagoreans was the purity of the soul, for that was the good part of our being. It was believed that there were two practices by which one could purify one's soul. The first of these practices was that of ascetic living.[15] This ascetic living was governed by a series of very strict rules...for example, some of there rules were:

1. When one goes to bed at night, one must enter the bed from one side and get up in the morning on the other side of the bed.
2. When you take off your shoes, you start with the left foot and when you put them on, you start with the right foot.
3. You are not to allow swallows (the bird) to land on the roof of your house.
4. You must not eat beans.

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[15]Ascetics try and deprive the body of its influence in life. They eat meager amounts and deny themselves many of the physical pleasures we take for granted.

Mathematics

Though the physical rules were practiced, there as a second and more important way to purify the soul...and that was through the use of mathematics. They saw math as the purest form of logic and reasoning and something that could not be corrupted. Mathematics also improves the mind's ability to think and reason. Often they would use pebbles to represent numbers and they would make note of the "shapes" of the numbers. For example, if you laid out two rows of two pebbles, you would get the corresponding number, "4." The shape of the pebbles was a square, so the number four was referred to as a "square number," which is where we get the basis for the principle that two-squared is equal to four.[16]

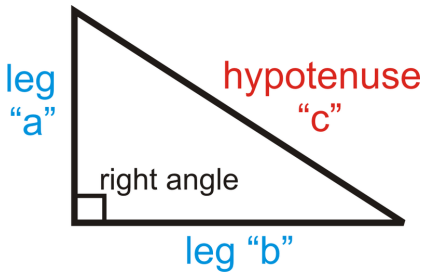
Discoveries

Given their attention to math and the "shapes" of numbers, the Pythagoreans made quite a few discoveries that we often do not attribute to the ancients.

1. They taught that the world was round, not flat.
2. They taught that the earth was not the center of the Solar System, but instead that the earth revolved around a "central fire." Note that they did not place the sun at the center of the solar system either, the sun, like the moon, was viewed as an object that reflected the light of the greater light all things revolved around.
3. They recognized that in music, there was a ratio between chords (for example, the sound that one string makes in relationship to a string that was twice its length or half its length). From this, the developed chords and half-notes.They believed that these ratios applied to the planets themselves, suggesting that the planets make music, coining the idea of the "music of the spheres."

The Pythagorean Theorem

One of mathematic discoveries that the Pythagoreans made that has been handed down to us is what is known as the Pythagorean Theorem. The Pythagoreans noticed that there was a fixed a relationship between the length of the legs of a right triangle and the hypotenuse. This relationship can be expressed as an equation: $A^2+B^2=C^2$.



Reincarnation of the Soul

[16]The Greek word for "pebble" is "calculus," from which the higher math gets its name.

As Pythagoras believed that the soul was immortal and incorruptible, he raised the question as to what might happen to the soul after one died. His conclusion was that the souls were essentially recycled in a form of reincarnation. And, based on the character of one's life, one's reincarnation would be either higher or lower in significance. It was possible, for Pythagoras, that human souls could come back in non-human forms, but they typically were thought of as returning as human.

With this in mind, Pythagoras created an analogy centered around the Olympian games to identify three levels of human beings. The first, and lowest level, were represented by those who had to work at the games. Their lives were bound to the Olympics and controlled by the Olympics, but they largely remained in the background and without any glory.

The second level was represented by the athletes at the games. These athletes attended the games and competed with excellence, thus receiving glory for their efforts, but their lives were still tied to the games and could not be separated from them.

The third, and highest level, was represented by the spectators at the games. The spectators could attend and watch the games, but also had the luxury of being separate from the games. The spectators could come and go, analyze the competitors, and choose which events they wanted to watch. For Pythagoras, the spectators represented the philosophers of the world who could observe and critique the events of civilization without being bound to the events.

Questions for Review:

1. What do we know about the man, Pythagoras? _____

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2. How was the Pythagorean view different than the Monists before him? _____

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3. Name two scientific discoveries that the Pythagoreans made: _____

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_____

4. What lasting mathematical equation did the Pythagoreans contribute? _____

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5. What was Pythagoras' analogy of the Olympic Games? _____

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Chapter 4: The Eleatics and the Atomists of Thrace

About 190 miles from Croton was the Italian city of Elea, again a part of Magna Graecia.[17] Two major figures arose from this city: Parmenides (515-460 BC) and Zeno (490-430 BC). Of the early philosophers, Plato considered Parmenides the greatest and in Plato's dialogues, Parmenides is the only philosopher that Plato depicts Socrates losing a debate against.[18]

Parmenides

Parmenides can be presented as the first philosopher who was a rationalist.[19] For Parmenides, what that meant was that he believed that the world around us has a rational relationship to the structure of the human mind. In other words, what we call logic and rules of logic are also found in the natural world. Thus the human mind has the ability to completely understand the universe if given the time.

Zeno

Zeno, a student of Parmenides, created a series of paradoxes[20] to defend his master. These paradoxes both show the importance of using reason, but they also demonstrate that reason is not sufficient in and of itself, but that one cannot separate reason from observation.

The Runner in the Race

One of Zeno's paradoxes describes a runner in a 100 yard race. The starter says, "On your mark, get set, go!" And then the runner begins running. Yet, before the runner can run the whole race, he must run half of the race. And before he can run half of the race, he must run half of that, or a quarter of the race. Before the runner can run a quarter of the race, he must run one-eighth of the race and so forth. Since a distance has an infinite number of divisions representing an infinite number of spaces across which the runner must run and since an infinite number of spaces takes an infinite amount of time to cross, then the runner never completes the race.

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[17]Magna Graecia is the term that refers to "Greater Greece"...all of the Greek colonies in the ancient world.

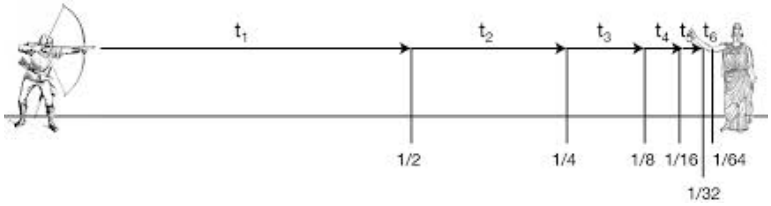
[18]Many of the writings of Plato are in the forms of dialogues, normally with Socrates as the major figure and the hero of the debate.

[19]A rationalist argues that all knowledge comes to us through the process of right reasoning.

[20]A paradox is reasoning that sounds correct but that leads to a conclusion that is absurd and nonsense.

The Arrow

Imagine an archer shooting an arrow at a target. Zeno points out that when the arrow flies through the air, at any point in time, the arrow takes up a space in the air equal to itself. Yet, if the arrow is taking up a space equal to itself, this is another way of saying that the arrow is at rest and thus, the arrow never moves at all.



Really?

Paradoxes like this are meant to cause us to scratch our heads because they are opposite from our observations and opposite of common sense. At the same time, the logic of each of these (along with Zeno's other paradoxes) is sound. Of the two that are noted above, what we refer to as modern Calculus was created to answer the first paradox and the second paradox is explained by the Principle of Relativity advanced by Galileo Galilei (AD 1564-1642) and Sir Isaac Newton (AD 1642-1727), but made a household name by Albert Einstein (AD 1875-1955).

The Pre-Atomists

We now move from the central and eastern portions of Italy southward toward the city of Akragas, on the island of Sicily. Here we find a man by the name of Empedocles (490-430 BC) who sought to harmonize the thought of Parmenides with the philosophers that came before him. As part of this process, he began arguing that there were more than one or two basic elements that all other things came from...in fact, he argued that there were four equally basic elements. These he called "the 4 Roots." And, in his view, it was the combination of these four roots that created all of the variety there is within the natural world. Empedocles went on to say that there were also two principles that governed the combination of these four roots, namely love (which combines) and hate (which separates).

Responding to Empedocles was Anaxagoras (500-428 BC), a man born in Asia Minor but who would take Philosophy to mainland Greece, to the city of Athens. Anaxagoras argued that there is too much diversity in the world to explain things with just four elements, but instead that there were an infinite number of qualitatively different things making up the world around us. He asks, for example, "How can hair become non-hair?"

Furthermore, Anaxagoras argued that everything in the universe contains at least a little bit of every one of these basic elements. Thus, were you to ask him, "How can a brown cow eat green grass and produce white milk that makes strong teeth?" He would answer that even in the grass there is an element that is shared with teeth. He did not believe that grass could turn into teeth,

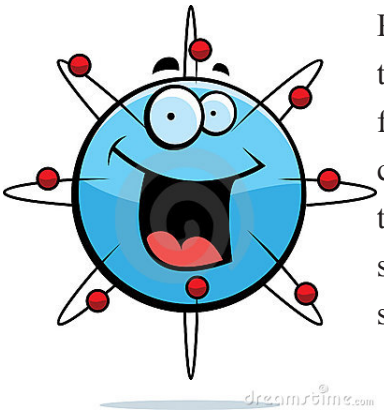
simply that on the basic level there were shared elements.

Anaxagoras also argued that there was a principle of change. This he called the "*mneus,"* which is the Greek word for "mind." While Anaxagoras did not develop this idea far, Socrates would build on Anaxagoras' idea and argue that there is a rational mind at work in the universe.

The Atomists

While we see in the pre-Atomists the idea of a finite (Empedocles) or an infinite (Anaxagoras) number of qualitatively different elements to the universe, we find in the Atomists the view developing that there were an infinite number of qualitatively identical elements in the universe...the term that they used was "Atom."[21] These atoms were considered to be uncreated and indestructible (and thus are eternal) and is not that different from Antoine Lavoisier's "Law of the Conservation of Mass" that would be developed in the late 18th century.[22]

The leader in the Atomist movement was Democritus (462-371 BC), a contemporary of Plato, who was born in Thrace. Plato disliked Democritus so much that he desired all of his books burned, but Plato's student, Aristotle, found some affinities with his thought. Some historians will categorize Democritus as an early scientist given his contributions to early atomic theory and geometry. At the same time, since there is so much overlap between philosophy and science during this era, it seems appropriate to classify him with the philosophers of his day.



Questions for Review:

1. Choose one of Zeno's paradoxes. Please explain it in your own words. What do you think of his reasoning? _____

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2. The Atomist movement is beginning to sound a lot like modern chemistry. Why do you think

[21]The word Atom, in Greek, means "cannot be divided."

[22]Levoisier argued that in a closed system, mass can never be created or destroyed, but only can change forms. Related to this is the Law of the Conservation of Energy which says the same of energy but also argues that mass can change form into energy. Assuming the Universe to be a closed system, all matter/energy must be eternal by this line of thinking (though note that by all scientific observations, the universe does not behave like a closed system).

that we should still classify Democritus with the Philosophers and not with the Scientists? ____

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"The Rotund One"

Chapter 5: Socrates and Plato

As we have been seeing, much of the Greek philosophy that was done took place in the Greek colonies. Yet, around the year 450 BC, thought and art began to shift to the Greek city-state of Athens. And in Athens would arrive two of the most prominent thinkers in history. There also arose in Athens a group of thinkers known as the "Sophists."[23] Yet, to call them thinkers is a bit unfair to the genuine philosophers of history.

The Sophists made money teaching people how to argue and win debates (winning even by whatever means necessary). For them, logic and philosophy was just a means to an end, a way to make money and to get your way in life, not a means by which one pursued truth. In fact, for the Sophists, every person made up their own truth. The leader of this group was a man by the name of Protagoras (490-420 BC). His famous statement was that "Man is the measure of all things," in other words, there are no absolute truths that govern mankind, only the views of the individuals and of the culture.

Opposition

Opposition to the Sophists comes from an unusual place. In Athens lived a man named Socrates (470-399 BC) who was a stone-cutter by trade. One day a friend of Socrates went to the Oracle at Delphi[24] for counsel and the Oracle told him, "Your friend, Socrates, is the wisest man in the world." When the friend recounted this saying to Socrates, Socrates did not believe it to be true, so he began talking to people in Athens to find someone wiser than he was to prove the Oracle wrong.

The Socratic Method

Socrates' approach to teaching was to simply ask leading questions and chase the argument wherever the argument took them. The practice of teaching this way is now referred to as the Socratic method in honor of him. Socrates would get people to analyze key words in their arguments, ultimately showing them that they often did not know what they were talking about.

Socrates asked Protagoras whether each person is the ultimate judge of good and evil.

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[23]Note that while the name "Sophist" means, "Wise One," the term arose as more of an insult — people were saying that they were "wise in their own eyes," not wise in anyone elses'.

[24]This was a religious figure to whom people would go for advice and council. The oracle would usually respond in mysterious phrases that could be interpreted in a variety of ways.

Protagoras responded by saying, "yes, each person is." Socrates then told Protagoras that he had taken a poll of all of the people of Athens and that in that poll, 95% of the people thought that Protagoras was crazy. Thus, according to Protagoras' own rule that man was the measure of all things, Protagoras had to agree that he was crazy.

Socrates went on to point out that everyone's ideas are not and cannot be equally correct. One doctor might say that you will die because of this sickness. Another doctor might say that this sickness will kill you. Who is right? Which doctor knows better? The answer is determined by what happens in the future (if you live or die will determine which doctor understood your disease more accurately).

Virtue

Socrates made it his goal to communicate three basic ideas:

1. You must understand the meaning of the words you use.
2. The health of the human soul is more important than the health of the human body.
3. It is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustice.

The later philosopher, Philo, believed that Socrates had traveled to Egypt and met the prophet Jeremiah, but Jeremiah was long dead by the time that Socrates would have been born. Even so, if there were such a thing as a "Virtuous Pagan," Socrates would be as good a candidate as you will find anywhere.

Writings

Socrates did not leave behind any writings of his own. What we know about him is told to us through the writings of his student, Plato, along with Xenophon (another student) and Aristophanes (a poet).

Death

Socrates would be arrested in Athens on the grounds that he was teaching the youth to abandon the greek gods and inciting the youth to reject the governing authorities of the city. Socrates was not an atheist and had a high view of god, but he did openly criticize the powers that ruled the city who were trying to push for a democratic government. It has been speculated that one of the main reasons for his arrest was that he had made the leaders of the city look like fools in the eyes of the people.

Socrates was tried for his "crimes" and sentenced to death. His friends bribed the jailer and planned an escape for Socrates, but Socrates had too much integrity to break the law even if it meant saving his own life. Socrates said, "All of my life I have benefitted by being a citizen of Athens under the laws of Athens. Now at the age of Athens, when afflicted by unjust application of

laws, I should not disobey them because they are inconvenient." In the end, he willingly accepted the poison drink that he had been given that would take his life.

The Rotund One

Socrates' greatest pupil was a man named Aristocles, but we know him better by his nickname, Plato.[25] Plato came from a wealthy family that was able to trace its roots all of the way back to some of the kings of the city-state of Athens. Early on, Plato showed little interest in philosophy...that is until he was about 28 years old and he witnessed the trial and execution of Socrates, something that created in him an enormous respect for the man and his teachings.

Travels

After the death of Socrates, Plato traveled to Italy until he met the Pythagoreans. It is from this group that Plato learned the idea of reincarnation as well as the concept of separation of body and soul. Some would argue that Plato's greatest contribution was the idea of the World of Forms, something that arguably has some similarities to the mathematical forms of the Pythagoreans as well.

At the age of 40, Plato returned to Athens and began what is known as "The Academy."

Writings

Plato's writings can be divided into three sections and are essentially structured as a series of dialogues between characters, following the Socratic method, do discern truth. The Early dialogues, written shortly after founding the Academy, show that Plato is still formulating his ideas and the influence of Socrates is clear within them.

The Middle dialogues you still see Socrates, but you also see an emerging Plato with Socrates often defending Plato's ideas. The Later dialogues find Plato as an older man, fairly grumpy and set in his ways, and where Socrates is less regular and only shows up to defend Plato's ideas.

Plato Opposes

While Plato is not Christian, his writings are useful for Christians based on the things that Plato opposes. Plato opposed seven major ideas that were prominent in Athens of his day:

1. Atheism:[26] Plato was an enemy of atheism, so much so, that he saw them as an enemy of the republic and should be executed.

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[25]Plato means "wide in breadth or rotund" and was a nickname given to him by his wrestling coach when he was younger.

[26]The belief that there is no God.

2. Empiricism:[27] Plato rejects the idea that all knowledge comes through the senses and instead says that it is gained through reason and logic.
3. Relativism:[28] This is the position of the Sophists. Plato believes that there is absolute truth.
4. Hedonism:[29] Plato argued that if pleasure is the highest good, what happens if one man's pleasure requires an evil to be committed against another.
5. Materialism: Plato believed in an eternal soul and rejected the idea that only matter exists as foolish.
6. Naturalism: Plato believed in a super-natural realm.
7. Mechanism:[30] Plato recognized design at work in the world and thus the world was not just a giant machine operating on the basis of cause and effect.

Forms

Plato believed that there are two worlds in existence: the material world and the World of Forms. For Plato, the Forms represented the perfect "things" by which things in the material world are patterned. For example, we can all imagine a circle, but no circle drawn on earth is ever a perfect circle. The perfect circle exists, but it exists in the World of Forms. The same thing could be said of dogs, chairs, rocks, and just about anything else. Everything in the material world is but an imperfect version of the Form that exists in the perfect World of Forms. We will explore this more in the next chapter when we address Plato's famous Parable of the Cave.[31]

Questions for Review:

1. Who was the leader of the Sophists and what was his famous saying? _____

_____

_____

2. What is the Socratic Method? _____

_____

_____

3. What event caused Plato to become interested in Philosophy? Before he opened his Academy, what group did Plato also spend time with? _____

[27]The belief that all knowledge comes through the senses.

[28]The belief that truth is always relative to the person and to the situation.

[29]The belief that pleasure is the highest virtue to which one ought to strive.

[30]The belief that the world is just an elaborate machine and thus our actions have no greater or higher purpose.

[31]Another example of the Forms is the number 1. We write the number "1" all of the time, but what we write is just the symbol for an idea. For Plato, the idea resides in the World of Forms.

4. What is the World of Forms? _____

_____

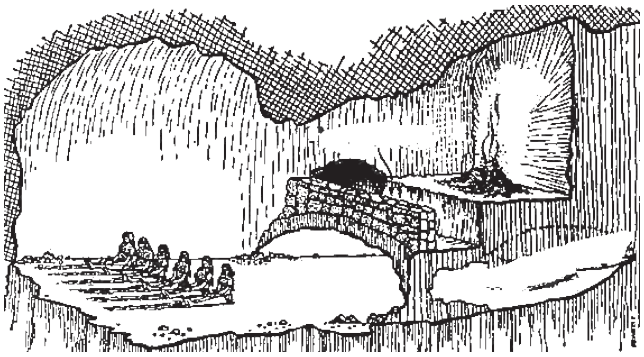
_____

"The Danger of Enlightenment"
Chapter 6: The Parable of the Cave

To illustrate the World of Forms, Plato told a parable...

Imagine a deep and dark cave. And in this cave there were a group of people that had been held captive. These people had never seen the outside world but all they knew was the inside of this deep, dark cave.

Now imagine that this group of people also were chained within the cave that limited their movement and all they could do was to look forward. Behind this group of people, in the back of the cave, was a large fire that provided light. This light was enough to illuminate the cave, but not brightly so.



In front of this fire there was a pathway. On this pathway, there would be brought across (in front of the light) silhouettes of animals and plants and such. These silhouettes would be identified as elephant or tree or the like, but all the people in chains would see is the shadow on the wall in front of them of the silhouette. It is not hard to imagine that before long, those in chains would identify the shadows by the name they are given.

Now, imagine that one of the enchained people is freed and is shown a pathway that leads to the surface of the earth. At first, he may be reluctant, for he is being taken away from the world that he knows. Further, it may be difficult for him to recognize the error of identifying the shadows as real when he recognizes that they are merely shadows. Yet, with patience, he will see his error and proceed toward the entrance of the cave.

When the man gets to the entrance of the cave at the surface of the earth, the sun outside may hurt and even blind his eyes for a moment. Yet, as his eyes adjust, he will see the world as it really is. Then he will surely see the error of putting names to the shadows in the cave for he will see a tree and an elephant and all things as they really are under the light of the sun.

Then, will this man not praise his freedom and celebrate the understanding he has been given, having been freed from such bondage that bound both his mind and his body? Will he not say that he would rather be a servant in a man's house in the real world than to be a king of the

people bound in the cave?

But let us further ask what would happen if this man, having seen the world for what it really is, decided that he would return to the cave to enlighten those whom he had once dwelt with. But what would the people's response be? Having no experience apart from being in the cave, would the people believe his story or his description of trees and elephants? No, the people would reject his testimony as false or even insane. It is likely that they would mock him as a fool that just did not or could not understand.

Imagine then, that the freed man tried to free one of the other people bound in the cave. Would they not resist? Would they not struggle against this man so that they too would not become insane? Indeed, would they not seek to put this man to death, even, to preserve the status quo of their little society in the cave, no matter how blind and shallow it is?

Explanation

This classic parable tells us a great deal about the thought and philosophy of Plato. But to begin with, let us reflect on what the different states represent. First, life in the Cave is meant to represent life on the earth. The world above, where everything is seen in perfect clarity, represents the world of Forms. Everything that we observe, Plato thought, was but a shadow of what exists in the ultimate sense in the World of Forms. The sun, that illuminates the upper world, is the highest of the forms, something Plato refers to as "The Good."

Furthermore, it is the philosopher, whose mind is enlightened to the World of Forms, that has the responsibility of returning to the cave to tell mankind of that which is greater...even if that means being ridiculed or killed (remember, Socrates' execution played a significant role in Plato's personal development. The Philosopher does not have the option of dwelling forever in the World of Forms, no matter how much he might desire to do so; he must tell others.

Note too that the World of Forms also includes ideas and propositions. These are called "universals." Universal ideas are things like the relationship between objects (over, under, behind, etc...) or a sense of proportion (bigger, smaller, better, worse). There is some parity between a person's observation of these things in the cave (one knows which image comes before or after), but perfection comes in the world of Forms. Further, those mathematical propositions that are true, can be said to be equally true in both worlds (1+1=2 whether in the material world or in the World of Forms.

The Good

The idea of Plato's "Good" has captured the imagination of many Christian philosophers through the years because of how "close" Plato got to a Biblical understanding of God. For example:

1. The good is the highest goal and the end of all human life.
2. The good is a necessary condition of human knowledge (as the sun illuminates the world).
3. The good is the creative and sustaining power of the world.

Questions for Review:

1. Who is the man in the cave that needs to come out? _____

2. Why does the man who has been let out of the cave have an obligation to go back in?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Chapter 7: Aristotle and Euclid

Though he was born in Greece[32], Aristotle's father had taken the position of the personal physician to the King of Macedonia, thus moving the family away from the mainland and back into the Greek colonies. This meant, though, Aristotle's family had wealth and sent him to Athens to study under Plato.

In many ways, Aristotle was both Plato's best and worst student. Aristotle was the best student in that he was clearly the brightest and history has demonstrated that his thought has been the longest lasting. At the same time, while one typically expects a student to further develop his instructor's ideas, Aristotle separated from Plato on numerous philosophical points, developing a school of thought that has proven to be quite different from his master's.

Interestingly, when Plato died, he did not leave the Academy to Aristotle, but instead left it to his nephew, Speusippus (how's that for a name!). Not receiving the Academy, Aristotle took to travel in the Greek part of the world and in 342 BC would return to Macedonia to accept the position of tutor to the King of Macedonia's son, Alexander.[33] There is evidence that Alexander wasn't the best student that a tutor could have, but a friendship developed between these two men and when Alexander became king and took his armies throughout the known world, he regularly sent his former teacher samples of plants and other things that he discovered.

Unfortunately for Aristotle, his friendship was a two-edged sword. When Alexander the Great died, and there was general unrest against those who were Macedonian, Athens became a dangerous place for Aristotle to stay. Fearing that Athens would execute him as they executed Socrates, Aristotle fled Greece, saying, "I will leave Athens so that Athens will not sin twice against philosophy."

At the end of Aristotle's life, he willed his library of writings and notes to a friend named Theophrastus (371-287 BC). He felt that the best way to preserve Aristotle's writings from his enemies was to hide them. The problem was that he buried them and then forgot where they were buried! Worse, he died before the writings were found! The writings would not be found for another 100 years and by that time, the originals were in very bad shape. Remnants were put together along with notes from Aristotle's former students to reconstruct his writings.

Contributions

Aristotle's greatest contribution was that he was a remarkable systematizer of logic. While many of the ideas found in Aristotle are found in earlier thinkers, Aristotle systematized them in

[32]Aristotle's dates are 384-322 BC.

[33]History knows this Alexander better as "Alexander the Great" (356-323 BC).

such a way that provided a foundation for logic that is used even today. While some post-modern philosophers have tried to create a system of philosophy not based on Aristotle's logic, these systems have proven cumbersome and have not proven useful.

The Law of Non-Contradiction

The most basic law to human thinking is the Law of Non-Contradiction. This law essentially states that mutually contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same way at the same time. For example, your pet cannot be both an alligator and not an alligator at the same time and in the same way. It either is an alligator or it is not an alligator, one or the other...both cannot be true. This rule of logic is often summarized by the following shorthand: "A cannot be both A and Non-A at the same time."

While this law may seem obvious, its importance should never be underestimated. Without the Law of Non-Contradiction, no significant thinking is possible nor is language meaningful. Many post-modern thinkers seek to do away with this law, but interestingly they use the Law of Non-Contradiction to try and prove their point.

Forms and Matter

Like his former teacher, Aristotle also spoke of both matter and form. The difference, though was while Plato felt that forms existed in a World of Forms, Aristotle believed that they existed in the material thing. The consequence of Aristotle's view was that he paid more attention to the natural world while Plato had paid more attention to the spiritual world.

Thus, for Aristotle, all things were a combination of form and matter...with one exception. Aristotle's concept of god was that he was pure form and possessed no matter whatsoever. This being that functioned as Aristotle's god served no religious function, but only existed to solve two dilemmas in his philosophy: Change and Motion.

The Unmoved Mover

Aristotle recognized that change and motion require someone or something to act upon that which is being changed or moved. For example, if you want to break a stick, someone or something must exert force upon the stick to break it. If you want to move a ball from place to place, then someone or something must give the first "push" or make the first "pull" to set the object into motion.

If this were applied to the universe as a whole, Aristotle recognized that there must be a first mover to set things into motion which itself did not need to be moved by an outside force. The same is true with change. For change to begin in the universe there must be a first-changer who himself does not need to be changed. This argument not only defined Aristotle's understanding of

his god, but it also provided the basis for two of St. Thomas Aquinas' proofs for the existence of God.

Euclid[34]

Euclid is best known for his mathematics...in particular for his works on geometry. To this day, Euclid's *Elements* is one of the most influential books on mathematics ever written. Where we need to include him with Aristotle was his concept of "Self-Evident Truths." Euclid's system of logic began with the principle that for a debate to take place, one must start at a point where all parties not only find agreement, but also where the facts themselves are so fundamental that they cannot be refuted. From that point, through the right use of logic, useful arguments can be made. Beyond that reference, we will leave Euclid to history and mathematics.

Questions for Review:

1. What famous figure did Aristotle tutor? _____
2. What happened to Aristotle's library after he died? _____

_____

_____

3. Please explain the Law of Non-Contradiction: _____

_____

_____

4. What did Aristotle mean when he referred to his god as the "Unmoved Mover"? _____

_____

_____

5. What is Euclid's major contribution to Logic? _____

_____

_____

[34]Little is known about this thinker's life, though we know he lived and wrote somewhere during the 3rd century, about a generation behind Aristotle.

"Law of Non-Contradiction"
Chapter 8: Logic and Categories

We have already discussed the Law of Non-Contradiction, but it is worth emphasizing its importance once again. In fact, the sentence that I just wrote means absolutely nothing if the Law of Non-Contradiction is rejected. For example, if you don't know the meaning of a word, you look that word up in a dictionary and are given a list of meanings that can be assigned to a given word – for example, a "slug" can refer to:

- a mollusk that has no shell and leaves behind a gooey residue
- a rounded piece of metal fired from a shotgun or from an airgun
- a punch with the fist
- a swallow of a drink
- a lazy person
- a counterfeit coin
- the metal bar used on a linotype machine

While that seems like a lot of uses for one word, a slug does not refer to a dog or to a bowl of ice cream. If the Law of Non-Contradiction did not exist, then any word could mean anything and thus, the sentence: "You have permission to pet the dog" might mean, "Go buy milk and bread on your way home from work." Where there is no meaningful language there are no meaningful exchanges of ideas and no meaningful action can be taken or accomplished. The Tower of Babel is a testimony to that truth once God confused the languages.[35]

Categories

Aristotle is also well known for his doctrines of Categories and Causes. For Aristotle, categories of things not only helps us differentiate, let us say, a cat from a dog, but they also help us to understand the things themselves. Aristotle also argued that there were essential and non-essential categories. Non-Essential categories, if altered, did not change the essence of the thing. For example, color is non-essential. We might have a red chair, a brown chair, and a green chair... but all are still chairs.

Yet, there are also essential categories; things which, if altered, mean that the item is no longer what it once was. For example, let's say we take one of those chairs and bust it into splinters...then it is no longer a chair and it has become kindling.

Aristotle argued for 10 types of categories that could be used to explain and catalogue a thing:

1. Substance (what is it made of or what is it's purpose?)

[35]See Genesis 11:1-9.

2. Quantity (how much or how many?)
3. Quality (good or bad? distinctive features?)
4. Place (where is it?)
5. Relation (what is its connection to other people or things?)
6. Time (when does it exist?)
7. Posture (is it standing, sitting, laying down, etc...?)
8. State (is it covered by something else, is it decorated?)
9. Action (is it moving or at rest?)
10. Passion (what is happening to it?)

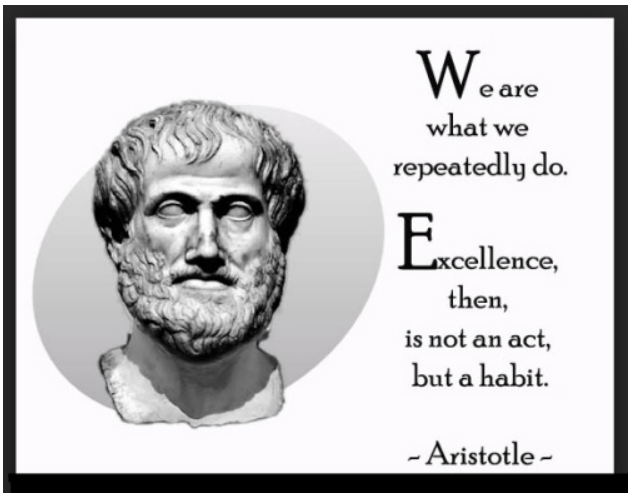
Potential, Actuality, and Change

Aristotle also argued that things often had potential that required a process of change to bring out (or Actualize) the potential. For example, an acorn has the potential to grow into an oak tree, yet an acorn itself is not an oak tree. One must plant the acorn in the ground, water it and tend it and over time that acorn will grow into a healthy oak. Another example is that a young baby has the potential to grow up to be a healthy adult, yet again, for that to happen, change must take place. Change is that which converts the potential into the actual.

The Golden Mean

When it came to virtue, Aristotle did not believe that people ought to strive for extremes. Instead, he believed that there was a middle ground that all should strive toward. This middle ground he called "the Golden Mean."

For example, while Courage is a good thing, too much courage results in reckless behavior and too little courage results in cowardice. Thus, the Golden Mean of courage was to be strived for. Many more examples could be given of this, but the one ought to suffice to illustrate Aristotle's point.



Questions for Review:

1. What is the difference (for Aristotle) between an essential and a non-essential category?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Please explain the idea of potential, actuality, and change in your own words. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What was Aristotle's Golden Mean? _____

_____

_____