HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY

From *The History of Philosophy: A Short Survey*

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CONTENTS

A. INTRODUCTION

The final phase of ancient Greek philosophy begins after Aristotle, during a period of history that we call *Hellenistic* civilization, which lasted from around 300 BCE to 200 CE. The term "Hellenistic" means "Greek-like" (derived from "Hellen," the word that the ancient Greeks used to describe their civilization), and refers to the uniquely Greek culture that spread around the ancient world beginning with the military campaigns of Alexander the Great. When Alexander first conquered the Mediterranean world, small city-states were enveloped by larger political dynasties. Culturally, the conquered territories were infused with Greek culture—language, art, religion, and philosophy. When Alexander died, his empire was divided among his generals into dynasties. These Greek dynasties were soon conquered by the Romans, who themselves adopted Greek culture and philosophy, spreading it further throughout their Empire. All the while, Athens continued to dominate as a philosophical learning center, with Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, and several new Hellenistic schools. While the new schools continued discussing the same issues of nature, reality and knowledge as did their predecessors, they added a therapeutic element, offering unique accounts for attaining happiness. The Greek word for happiness is *eudaimonia*, and it is often translated as "the good life", or "the highest human good," or "well-being". Aristotle had already developed this concept in his ethical theory, maintaining that human happiness consists of living virtuously in accord with human reason. Each Hellenistic school, though, developed its own conceptions of what it takes for humans to achieve happiness. The principal schools of this period that we will look at here are Cynicism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, and Neoplatonism.

B. CYNICISM

One of the first Hellenistic schools to emerge is that of Cynicism, which emphasized denying established conventions and following one's natural inclinations. Cynic philosophers taught through deliberately shocking speech and action, thereby conveying their condemnation of traditional social values such as wealth, reputation, pleasure, property, family duties, and religion.

The earliest Cynic philosopher, an Athenean named Antisthenes (c. 444-365 BCE), studied under Socrates and was present at his execution. But unlike Plato who was inspired by the content of Socrates' teachings and his dialectic method, Antisthenes was attracted to Socrates' "in your face" attitude and learned from him "the art of enduring, and of being indifferent to external circumstances"—that is, an independent way of living. While none of Antisthenes' writings survive, he is credited with a number of startling sayings that reflect his defiant attitude towards social convention, such as "I would rather go mad than feel pleasure." He was once criticized for associating with disreputable men, and he responded "Physicians also live with those who are sick, but they do not catch fevers." Plato once spoke poorly of him and Antisthenes replied "It is a great privilege to do well, and to be ill spoken of." Once he was asked why he had so few disciples, and he replied "Because I drove them away with a silver rod." When asked why he criticized his pupils with harsh language, he said "Physicians too use severe remedies for their patients."

Diogenes the Dog

Antisthenes' most famous pupil, and the one who gave the most distinct character to the school of Cynicism, was Diogenes (412-323 BCE), who came to Athens from the city of Sinope on the north coast of what is now Turkey. He was exiled from his home town when he and his father defaced the coinage of that city—an act of disrespect which in our times would be the equivalent of burning the flag. Someone once criticized him for being exiled, and he responded, "You wretched man, that is what made me a philosopher!" In Athens he continually pestered Antisthenes to take him on as a student, eventually provoking the master to raise his stick to hit him. Diogenes put his head under the stick and said, "Strike, for you will not find any stick hard enough to drive me away as long as you continue to speak." Antisthenes then took him on.

As with his teacher, none of Diogenes writings survive, but an array of stories about his peculiar views and behavior give us a picture about what he believed. He lived as a beggar in the streets of Athens, sometimes residing in a barrel. He spent his days criticizing his fellow Athenians for their shallow lifestyles and blind adherence to social conventions that removed them from living freely according to the principles of nature. He said of himself that he adopted the same type of life as Hercules, preferring nothing in the world to freedom. He ignored subjects like music, geometry and astronomy, holding them to be useless and unnecessary. Someone once criticized him for philosophizing without possessing any knowledge; he responded, "If I only pretend to wisdom, that is philosophizing." The most famous story about him is that he walked around during the daytime with a lit candle saying "I am looking for a genuine man." His point was that few people lived as they should, try as we might to find them. This message is reflected in another story where, when returning from the Olympic games, someone asked him whether there was a great crowd there; he replied, "Yes, a great crowd, but very few men."

A running theme in Diogenes' philosophy was contempt for luxury. He said, "things of great value were often sold for nothing, and things worth nothing sold for a great price." When a famous general asked Diogenes to dine with him, Diogenes said "I would rather lick up salt in Athens than enjoy a luxurious table with him." Once he saw a child drinking out of his hands, and so Diogenes threw away his cup and said "That child has beaten me in simplicity." He also threw away his spoon when he saw a boy scoop up his food with a crust of bread after breaking his eating utensil. While rejecting luxuries, Diogenes warned about dismissing all pleasures since, paradoxically, people get a sense of pleasure from ascetic lifestyles. For, just as people who live in luxury grow accustom to it and resist losing it, so too do people feel a kind of pleasure in their contempt for pleasure. Legend has it that Alexander the Great once met him, saying "I am Alexander, the great king;" Diogenes replied "And I, am Diogenes the dog." Another version of the story relates that Diogenes was sunbathing and Alexander, who was nearby, said, "Ask any favor that you want from me"; Diogenes then requested that Alexander step to the side since he was blocking the sun.

Athenean citizens seem to have had a love-hate relation with him. On the one hand, he would boldly confront anyone he saw, mocking them for ordinary things. For example, when someone had dropped a loaf of bread and was too ashamed to pick it up again, Diogenes tied a cord round the neck of a bottle and dragged it through the streets while following the man, just to heckle him for his pride. Similarly, when he saw an untalented man tuning a musical instrument, he said to him "Aren't you ashamed to be arranging proper sounds on a wooden instrument, and not arranging your soul to a proper life?" There are also numerous stories about people hitting him. Once a man struck him with a broom, and said, "Watch it!" so Diogenes struck him back with his staff and said "Watch it!" On the other hand,

at least some citizens found him endearing and when a youth had broken Diogenes barrel, they beat the young man and gave Diogenes another one.

Diogenes acquired the nickname "the Dog", and in fact the name "cynicism" itself derives from the Greek word for "dog". While it's not clear how the designation "dog" originated, it may have been as simple as the fact that Diogenes was a vagabond, just like a stray dog. Someone once asked him what he did that made people refer to him as a dog, and he replied with a witty but unhelpful answer "Because I nuzzle up to those who give me anything, and bark at those who give me nothing, and bite the scoundrel." He was regularly ridiculed by people for his nickname, as when he was once eating in the marketplace and bystanders kept yelling "Dog" at him. He replied "It is you who are the dogs, who stand around me while I am at dinner." Once, too, some boys circled around him and said "We are watching out so that you don't bite us;" he responded, "Don't worry, a dog does not eat the meat of cows." One time at a banquet some of the guests threw him bones, as if he was a dog; he responded by lifting his leg and urinating on them just as a dog would.

Diogenes was in Athens while Plato was still alive, and the two did not get along well together. Plato once called him a dog, and Diogenes responded "I certainly am, for I have wandered back to those who sold me." Plato defined a human being as a "featherless biped"; Diogenes subsequently produced a plucked chicken and said "Here is Plato's human being." This prompted Plato to add to his definition that a human being is a featherless biped "with broad flat nails." Once Diogenes stood under a fountain, where bystanders were pitying him; Plato was also there and said "If you really want to show pity for him, just walk away" since he was only acting like that to gain a disgraceful reputation.

While traveling to another city, Diogenes' ship was captured by pirates and he was sold into slavery. When the slave auctioneer asked him what he was skilled at, Diogenes said "At governing people," and, pointing to a well-dressed buyer, he said "Sell me to that man, for he wants a master." The man indeed purchased Diogenes, put him in charge of his estate in the city of Corinth and had him tutor his son. He died at age 90 by holding his breath because, as his friends reported, he wished to escape the remaining portion of his life. A statue of a dog was placed on his grave.

C. EPICUREANISM

The founder and namesake of the Epicurean school was Epicurus (341–270 BCE), who adapted the Atomistic views of Democritus and held that happiness is achieved through pleasure. Epicurus was born on the island of Samos—just off of the Turkish peninsula—which at the time was a colony of Athens, thus giving him Athenian citizenship. He began his study of philosophy at the young age of 14 under the teaching of Democritus, and his Athenian citizenship required him, at age 18, to complete two years of military training. Being in Athens during this time allowed him the opportunity of hearing Greek philosophers who were there then, particularly Aristotle. He traveled for some time, perhaps learning from other philosophers, and, returning to Athens, he bought a house and establish his school, known as The Garden, which was located just outside of the city, and close to Plato's Academy. He remained at The Garden with his followers for the rest of his life. A most significant difference in his school was that they accepted women. Unlike with the Pythagorean school, Epicurus did not allow his followers to communally own their property, since he believed this showed a distrust of one another. There are reports of him harshly criticizing virtually every other philosopher of the time, calling Aristotle a glutton and drug dealer, the Cynics the enemies of Greece. At the same time, he was reputed to be kind towards everyone, with so many friends that "they could not be contained in whole cities." Epicurus' teaching so influenced society that we use the term "Epicurean," which has now strayed to mean luxurious living, rather than his philosophy that sought tranquility first of all through simple living. At 72 years of age, Epicurus died of kidney stones, making as a final request that his students remember his teachings.

He authored over 300 works, written in a plain and easy to follow style, containing no quotations from other philosophers. 37 of these were specifically on natural philosophy. Of his writings, only three short letters of his survive, which summarize his views. In addition to these, there is an important book-length exposition of his philosophy by the Roman poet Lucretius (c. 99-55 BCE), titled *On Nature.*

Atoms, the Slight Swerve, and Free Will

Epicurus philosophy of nature is an adaptation of the Presocratic Atomistic theories of Leucippus and Democritus. According to the classic Atomism, the only things that exist are atoms in a vacuum of empty space; they are continually moving, or at least vibrating, and have different sizes and shapes. Epicurus describes the basic features of the atoms here:

> The atoms are in a continual state of motion. Among the atoms, some are separated by great distances, others come very near to one another in the formation of combined bodies, or at times are enveloped by others which

> are combining. But in this latter case they, nevertheless, preserve their own peculiar motion, thanks to the nature of the vacuum, which separates the one from the other, and yet offers them no resistance. The solidity which they possess causes them, while knocking against one another, to react the one upon the other. Eventually the repeated shocks bring on the dissolution of the combined body; and for all this there is no external cause, the atoms and the vacuum being the only causes. [Epicurus, *Herodotus*]

An important adaptation that Epicurus made to Atomism is that atoms have weight and thus fall downward, each equally distant from the others. However, he recognized that if they all fell perfectly parallel to each other at the same speed, they would never collide to make larger composite bodies. Thus, atoms need to deviate at least a little when they fall, which allows them to make contact with other atoms. Expounding on Epicurus' theory, Lucretius calls this deviation the *slight swerve*, and describes its operation here:

> When bodies are carried downwards vertically through the void by their own weights, at quite uncertain times and uncertain spots they push themselves a little from their course: you just and only just can call it a change of inclination. If they did not swerve, they would all fall down, like drops of rain, through the deep void, and no colliding would have been resulted nor blow produced among the first-beginnings [i.e., atoms]: thus nature never would have produced anything. [Lucretius, *On Nature*, 2]

It's not clear exactly how the swerve takes place, but Epicurus seems to have held that it occurs without any cause. This claim drew attack from other early philosophers, such as the following by the Roman eclectic philosopher Cicero, who felt that there is no place in science for an uncaused event:

> The swerving is itself an arbitrary fiction; for Epicurus says the atoms swerve without cause. But this is the capital offense in a natural philosopher, to speak of something taking place uncaused. Then also he gratuitously deprives the atoms of what he himself declared to be the natural motion of all heavy bodies, namely, movement in a straight line downwards . . . This riotous hurly-burly of atoms could not possibly result in the ordered beauty of the world we know. [Cicero, *About the Ends of Goods and Evils*, 1.6]

Philosophers as well as scientists would have every reason to be suspicious about Epicurus's claim regarding an uncaused natural event. However, the general idea gains more sympathy today in view of the contemporary theory of indeterminacy in quantum physics (electrons do not have determinate positions and movements). And, just as Greek Atomists are considered intellectual forerunners to modern atomic theory, Epicurus' view of the slight swerve eerily anticipates contemporary indeterminacy.

While Epicurus initially introduces the theory of the slight swerve to explain how falling atoms collide and form clusters, he uses the theory to another important end, namely, to explain free will. In the chapter on the Presocratics, we noted that classical Atomism implies determinism: all events are determined according to the physical laws which govern atoms. Since humans are composed entirely of physical atoms, then all of our actions are determined according to such laws. Many ancient philosophers, like the early Atomists, were content with the notion of determinism. Epicurus, though, believed that free will is a fact of human experience: the actions that we perform throughout the day display free choice. The problem, then, is how to rectify physical determinism with free will. His solution is that free will is the result of the slight swerve:

> What causes this free will for living things all over the earth? From what source, I ask, is it extracted from fate—this will by which we move forward, where pleasure leads each one of us, and swerve likewise in our motions neither at determined times nor in a determined direction of place, but just where our mind has carried us? For without doubt it is one's own will that gives to each one a start for this movement, and from the will the motions pass flooding through the limbs. . . . But the very mind feels no such necessity within its doing all things, and is not constrained like a conquered thing to bear and suffer. This is brought about by the slight swerve of the first-beginnings [i.e., atoms] in no determined direction of place and at no determined time. [Lucretius, *On Nature*, 2]

According to Epicurus, then, atoms have the power of occasional uncaused movement, and thus the atoms that compose our human minds have this power as well. A single uncaused movement within an atom in my mind will trigger a sequence of events that breaks from the otherwise determined mental machinery.

Image-Flakes and Perception

Like the earlier Atomists, Epicurus held that the human mind is a purely physical thing, constructed of atoms, and also that perception results from image-flakes peeling off of objects and hitting our sense organs. Epicurus describes the way in which image-flakes fly off objects into the surrounding air:

> There are image-flakes whose shapes resemble the solid bodies which we see, but are much thinner than them. For it is possible that there may be in space some emissions of this kind, which have a capacity to form extremely thin films without depth, and that from solid objects there may emanate some particles that preserve the same position and motion that they had in solid objects body. We give the name of "image-flakes" (or "idols") to these particles. [Epicurus, *Herodotus*]

The image-flakes are extremely thin and have virtually no thickness. As they shed from objects, they are immediately replaced with others and thus do not trim down the objects themselves:

> One must not forget that the production of the image-flakes is as rapid as thought. For from the surface of the bodies particles of this kind are continually flowing off with no reduction of the bodies, because they are immediately replaced with others. They preserve for a long time the same position, and the same arrangement that their atoms had in the solid body, although, notwithstanding, their form may be sometimes altered. [Ibid]

For Epicurus, image-flakes provide the best explanation of how we perceive physical objects. The objects themselves exist in space at some distance from us, and something needs to be transmitted between the objects and our eyeballs in order for us to perceive them. One might suggest that the sense data gets transferred to us through air, or through a ray. However, Epicurus believes that the image-flake is a much better explanation of perception:

> It is difficult to conceive that external objects can affect us through the medium of the air which is between us and them, or by means of rays, whatever emissions proceed from us to them, so as to give us an impression of their form and color. This phenomenon, on the contrary, is perfectly explained, if we admit that certain particles of the same color, of the same shape, and of a proportionate magnitude pass from these objects to us, and so arrive at being seen and comprehended. [Ibid]

The image-flakes themselves retain all the physical characteristics of the object and carry that information directly to our senses. Even qualities like color and taste exist in the physical objects themselves, and those qualities are transmitted to us by image-flakes. This is a departure from the Atomistic view of Democritus who held that qualities like color and taste do not originally reside in physical objects, but are subjectively fashioned within the perceiver's mind.

Ethics: Pleasure and Pain

Perhaps the most influential aspect of Epicurus' philosophy is his view that morality is intimately linked with pleasure, and that our life's goal should be to minimize pain and maximize pleasure. He writes that "pleasure is the beginning and end of the good life. We recognize pleasure as the first good, being natural to us, and it is from pleasure that we begin every choice and avoidance. It is also to pleasure that we return, using it as the standard by which we judge every good" (*Letter to Menoeceus*). While it is easy enough to state as a general rule that we should all seek pleasure, the difficulty is in detailing which types of pleasures best bring about human happiness, and this is the task that Epicurus lays out for himself.

Step one in the quest for a happy and pleasurable life is to eliminate pains as much as we can. While physical pains can be an obstacle to happiness, they don't need to be. The most extreme pains usually pass quickly; he writes, "Pain does not last continuously in the physical body, and even in its most extreme it is present only a very short time. Physical pain that exceeds pleasure does not last many days" (*Principal Doctrines*). Chronic pains of lingering illnesses can also be managed so that on balance our lives contain more pleasure. For Epicurus, though, the real problem of pain is not with the physical ones, but psychological ones, particularly anxiety-producing fears. One major source of fear is religious myth, when we experience unease about how the gods view us, and whether they're poised to punish us or reward us. However, Epicurus argues that we are freed from the fear of the gods since they have nothing to do with human affairs. Natural events such as lightning and earthquakes are entirely the result of the configuration of atoms, and are not caused by the will of the gods. Epicurus does not deny the existence of the gods, but he says that they are

entirely different than how people commonly imagine them:

> We know there are Gods, since we have distinct knowledge of them. But they are not of the nature that people in general attribute to them, and they do not respect them in a way that agrees with the ideas that they entertain of them. A person is not irreverent for rejecting the Gods believed in by the masses, but, rather, is irreverent for applying to the Gods the opinions entertained of them by the masses. [Epicurus, *Menoeceus*]

The gods exist in a special realm between worlds, and in that state they are happy and completely unaware of our existence. Thus the Gods are irrelevant to what happens in our lives and we should just set this worry aside.

Another fear that gives us psychological pain is the terror we experience when thinking about our deaths. Epicurus's solution to this is simple: we are freed from the fear of death when realizing that everything is material, hence the soul cannot survive death; thus, no pain can be experienced after death. He writes,

> Accustom yourself to think that death is a matter that should not concern us. For all good and all evil depend on sensation, and death is only the removal of sensation. Accordingly, the correct view of the fact that death is no concern of ours makes the mortality of life pleasant to us, not because it gives us limitless time, but because it relieves us of the longing for immortality. There is nothing terrible in living to a person who rightly understands that there is nothing terrible in ceasing to live. Only a foolish person says that he fears death, not because it will cause him pain when it occurs, but because it pains him while he anticipates it. It is quite absurd if something that is not distressful when present should distress a person when it is only expected. [Ibid.]

Clearly, death cannot cause us pain once we die, since we no longer exist. The only issue is the anxiety that we experience when anticipating death, and this, Epicurus argues, is foolish since there is no pain to experience once we die.

In short, most of the pains that we experience in life can either be eliminated, or at least counterbalanced by pleasure. And this solves the problem of pain preventing us from achieving happiness. Step two, then, in the quest for happiness is understanding which pleasures are best for us. For, "while pleasure is the first good and natural with us, we do not choose every pleasure, but at times we pass over many pleasures when any difficulty is likely to result from them." We desire a wide range of things, and some contribute to happiness while others can be counterproductive. There are, he explains, three different kinds of desires. First, there are natural and necessary desires, which include food and shelter. These are easy to satisfy and should be pursued. Second, there are natural but unnecessary desires, such as luxury food. These, he argues, should not be pursued since we can't count on them being available and, when they aren't, we will be frustrated. Third, there are vain and empty desires, such as power, wealth, and fame. These are difficult to satisfy since they have no limit: even if we acquire power we always want more and thus will never be satisfied. So too with wealth and fame, and so, according to Epicurus, we should not pursue any of these. The key is to seek pleasure through moderation. Simple pleasures, he argues, give us the least amount of disturbance, whereas violent pleasures bring about violent pains – such as how the intense pleasure of drunkenness is followed by a hangover and any number of social problems. He writes,

> When we say that pleasure is the chief good, we are not speaking of the pleasures of the degenerate person, or those which involve sensual enjoyment—as some think who are ignorant or oppose our opinions, or else distort them. Rather, we mean the freedom of pain from the body and turmoil from the mind. Life is not made pleasant through continued drinking and partying, or sexual encounters, or feasts of fish and other such things as a costly banquet offers. It is sober contemplation which examines into the reasons for all choice and avoidance, and which chases away vain opinions from which the greater part of the confusion arises which troubles the mind. [Ibid.]

The third step in the quest for happiness is to develop the right virtues, that is, good habits, which will enable us to routinely experience the right kinds of pleasure, with the least amount of pain. Common virtues that Greek philosophers recommended are courage, honor, justice and moderation; Epicurus agrees that all of these good habits will lead us towards happiness. However, there is one main virtue that is the foundation of all of these, and that is *wisdom* (sometimes called "prudence"), which is the ability to make careful decisions about one's interests and thereby choose the best pleasures. Which pleasures does wisdom recommend? He writes, "Of all the things that wisdom provides for the happiness of the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friendship." Also high on the

list are good conversation and frugal living. On the other hand, wisdom tells us to avoid the pleasures of ambition, public activity, marriage and children, since these produce more pain than pleasure in the long run. Wisdom also tells us that we must live justly in order to be happy. But justice for Epicurus is not an absolute an independently-existing truth, as Plato believed with his theory of the Forms. Instead, justice consists only of contracts made between people to keep from harming each other. I agree to not injure you, you agree to not injure me, and as a result we both benefit by living in society. I recognize that I must keep this agreement since, if I don't, one day I will be caught regardless of how secretly I plan my attack on you. He writes that it is impossible for the unjust man "to believe that he will always escape notice, even if he has escaped notice already ten thousand times; for, until his death, it is uncertain whether or not he will be detected" (*Principle Doctrines*, 37).

D. STOICISM

Of all the philosophical schools active during Hellenistic times, Stoicism had the largest number of followers, and was often contrasted with Epicueanism, its closest rival. Stoicism held that the cosmos is governed by an over-arching fatalistic law, and we best achieve happiness when we resign ourselves to fate.

Zeno

The founder of Stoicism was a philosopher named Zeno (334–262 BCE) from the island of Cyprus (not to be confused with Zeno from Elea, who was the Presocratic follower of Parmenides). He was born in the city of Citium—now called Larnaca, one of Cyprus's largest cities. At the time it was a small city with ties to both Greece and the Semitic land of Phoenicia (now Lebanon). He moved to Athens at 22, perhaps as the result of a shipwreck. Legend has it that he was at a bookseller's stall in the market place reading Xenophon's account of Socrates. Fascinated by the philosopher, he asked the bookseller where he could find such a person. The bookseller replied "follow that man," pointing to a famous Cynic philosopher who happened to be walking by. Zeno became his student, then moved onto other teachers, and after about twenty years began lecturing himself. His first followers were called Zenonians, but later referred to as "Stoics" after the place where he gave his lectures, namely, on the Painted Porch (*Stoa Poikile*) in the marketplace of Athens.

He is described as having a slightly twisted neck and harsh personality traits. A student of his once noticed that Zeno corrected everyone around him, except that particular student himself. He asked Zeno why, and Zeno replied "Because I have no confidence in you." Zeno had very simple living habits, eating food that didn't require cooking, drinking mostly water, wearing thin clothes, and he was apparently insensible to rain, heat, and pain. These aspects of his personality were ridiculed in a Greek play that contained the following line: "This man adopts a new philosophy: he teaches to be hungry, and nevertheless he gets disciples. Bread is his only food, his best desert is dried figs, and water is his drink." While this description of Zeno is entertaining in itself, it also illustrates an important philosophical point for Stoicism: happiness is best attained by denying pleasures, and not by pursuing enjoyments as Epicurus recommended.

A famous story of Zeno relates that he once whipped a slave for stealing; the slave said it was his destiny to steal, and Zeno said it was also his destiny to be whipped. Again we find a philosophical message here: according to Stoicism, there is a consistency between the destiny that is fated for us and justice for how we behave. According to one account of Zeno's death, he strangled himself after breaking his toe, which he took to be an indication that his time was up. One of his books, called *The Republic*, was a work of utopian politics depicting a city that is run by rational citizens. Although the work does not survive, descriptions of its contents conform to his preference for simplicity and austerity. He recommends abolishing money, temples, law courts, marriage. Men and women should dress alike, completely covering their bodies, yet at the same time should practice free love.

Zeno divided the field of philosophy into three areas: logic, physics and ethics. Stoic philosophers offered various analogies to explain how these three parts are related, such as these:

> They compare philosophy to an animal, likening logic to the bones and sinews, physics to the fleshy parts, and ethical philosophy to the soul. They also compare it to an egg, calling logic the shell, and ethics the white, and physics the yolk. [Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, "Zeno," 33]

However, the most famous analogy, which was offered by Zeno himself, is that philosophy is like a garden where logic functions as the protective fence, physics is a tree within the garden, and ethics is the fruit that grows on the trees. We will consider each of these in order.

Logic: Conviction, Connectives, Argument Forms

There are many elements to Stoic logic, but we will examine three particularly interesting ones. First is their conception

of truth conviction. Zeno argued that are four degrees of conviction: perception, assent, comprehension, knowledge. For example, I might *perceive* an apple falling from a tree, and think nothing else of it. Then I might push the matter further and *assent* to—or hold a belief about—the falling apple. Then I might *comprehend* some implications of the falling apple, such as it would hurt if it fell on my head. Finally, I might have full *knowledge* about the falling apple, involving the laws of nature which made it act as it did. Zeno picturesquely explained the different degrees of conviction by slowly clenching his fist, as described here:

> Zeno illustrated this by the action of his hand. For showing his hand open to view with the fingers stretched out, *perception*, said he, is like this. Then, closing his fingers slightly, *assent* is like this. Next, entirely closed together his fingers and doubling his fist, he declared this position to resemble the mental act of *comprehension*; from that simile he also gave a new name to that mental act, calling it "grasping". Again when he had brought up his left hand and had tightly and powerfully closed it over the other fist, he said that *knowledge* was like that, and that no one was able to attain to knowledge but the wise person. [Cicero, *Academics*, 2.4]

Zeno also states that knowledge, which is the strongest level of conviction "takes hold of us by the hair and drags us to assent." The message behind these metaphors is that some beliefs are dramatically more compelling than others, and we have a high level of certainty of their truth.

A second component of Stoic logic involves understanding the underlying logical structure of the statements that we make, which they called "assertibles." Take, for example, these two simple assertible statements: "it is day" and "it is night." Using a logical connective, they can be spliced together into a longer one such as "it is day *or* it is night". In this case, the logical connective is the word "or". Of the many logical connectives discussed by the Stoics, in recent times the following four have become an essential part of logic in philosophy:

*Conditional (if-then): "*If* it is day, *then* it is light."
*Conjunction (and): "It is day *and* it is light."
*Disjunction (or): "It is day *or* it is night"
*Negation (not): "It is *not* day"

These four connectives are also foundational to computer programming where they are better known as "Boolean operators," named after the 19th century British mathematician George Boole.

A third aspect of Stoic logic is the underlying logical structure of arguments. Suppose, for example, that I make the following statement: "Plato is breathing, so he must be alive". This short sentence contains an argument and, according to the Stoics, the underlying structure of it is this:

If Plato is alive then Plato must be breathing.
Plato is alive
Therefore, Plato must be breathing

Or, more abstractly,

If A then B
A
Therefore, B

Today this particular logical form goes by the name *modus ponens*. Note that the logic of it hinges on a conditional "if-then" statement in the first line. Another logical argument form of the Stoics, which today goes by the name *disjunctive syllogism*, is this:

It is night or it is day
It is not night
Therefore, it is day

Or, more abstractly,

A or B
not A
Therefore, B

Here the underlying logic involves a disjunctive "or" statement in the first line, and a negation in the second line. These two argument forms—along with several others introduced by the Stoics—are foundational to contemporary notions of logical argumentation which have dominated philosophy since the early 1900s. Prior to that, it was Aristotle's conception of logic that reigned supreme. And, we will recall, the basis of logical argumentation for Aristotle was the *categorical syllogism*, the standard example of which is this:

(1) All men are mortal
(2) Socrates is a man
(3) Therefore Socrates is mortal

What is central to Aristotle's approach is that logic focuses on *categories* of things: the category of all men, the category of mortal things, and the category of Socrates the person. By contrast the Stoic's approach focuses on logical connectives such as *if-then*, *and*, *or*, and *not*.

Physics: God and Fate

Stoic theories of physics and cosmology are as detailed as any accounts offered by Epicurus, Aristotle, or the Presocratics. A short summary of the Stoic position on cosmology is this:

> The Stoics teach that God is unity, and that he is called Mind, and Fate, and Jupiter, and by many other names besides. As he was in the beginning by himself, he turned into water, the whole substance which pervaded the air. Just as the seed is contained in the fruit, so too, he being the seminal principle of the world, remained behind in moisture, making matter fit to be employed by himself in the production of those things which were to come after. Then he made the four elements, fire, water, air, and earth. . . . [The Stoics] say that all things are produced by fate. Fate is the connecting cause of existing things, or the reason according to which the world is regulated. [Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, Zeno, 68, 74]

The most prominent feature of their physics, as reflected in the above passage, is their notion of fate: everything in the world is determined according to the principle of divine law. Also, as the above indicates, they variously describe their notion of fate as God, fire, destiny, and, perhaps most significantly, *logos*—the Greek term for "order" first used by the Presocratic philosopher Heraclitus.

The Stoic concept of fate is best illustrated in a puzzle that Aristotle had introduced. Suppose that you are on a battleship, and you face the possibility of going into battle tomorrow: either the battle will happen or the battle won't happen. Even though we don't know the future, are either of these two possibilities true right now before they happen? Aristotle said no: both possibilities are indeterminate. He writes, "One may indeed be more likely to be true than the other, but it cannot be either actually true or actually false" (*On Interpretation*, 9). Stoics, on the other hand, take the opposite view: one of these possibilities is indeed true right now, before it ever happens, even though we don't yet know which one. The truth regarding the occurrence of a battle tomorrow is not established when the event takes place, but instead is already fixed on the timeline by fate. Today we refer to this position as the *law of bivalence* (literally meaning two things interacting). One Stoic philosopher explicitly used the law of bivalence as a proof that all things are fated:

> Now, every proposition is either true or false. If it be so, then all effects owe their existence to anterior causes. This once admitted, we must grant that all things are governed by fate. It follows therefore that everything which happens, happens by fate. [Cicero, *On Fate*, 10]

On this view, if we grant that any proposition about the future is either true or false right now, then we must accept that the state of affairs indicated in that proposition is fated long before it occurs.

Another aspect of the Stoic conception of fate is their rather gloomy theory that we now call *the eternal recurrence*: the history of the universe is cyclical, going through endless sequences of creation and destruction in which each new one is exactly the same as the previous ones. Heraclitus, we've seen, already suggested that the universe

continually goes through cycles of creation and destruction. What's new to the Stoic conception, though, is that each cycle is identical to the others. The life that I'm leading right now is one that I've already lived an infinite number of times in the past and will live again an infinite number of times in the future. The rationale behind this view is that the principle of cosmic order—the same *logos*—recreates the universe each time and thus does so the same way. There are three specific stages to each new cycle. It begins with creative fire, then moves on to the creation and organization of the four elements into the world that we see around us. It finally ends in fire again. Fate not only controls the order of our present world, but it locks in that same sequence of events through all successive versions of our world.

Ethics

The central theme of Stoic ethics is to live according to nature and resign oneself to what is fated in the world around us. There are three themes to Stoicism's ethical recommendation, the first of which involves living according to nature and its laws. As creatures of nature, the same cosmic ordering principle that gives structure to the world around us is also embedded within ourselves. Stoics coined the famous expression that there is a spark of divinity in each of us, by which they meant that the ordering principle of divine reason permeates each person just as it does the cosmos as a whole. To live ethically, then, is to live according to this ordering principle as it appears in both human nature and nature as a whole:

> In his treatise *On Human Nature*, Zeno was the first writer who said that the chief good was to live according to nature. This means living according to virtue, for nature leads us to this point. . . . Again, to live according to virtue is the same thing as living according to one's experience of those things which happen by nature. Our individual natures are all parts of universal nature. Because of this, the chief good is to live in a manner that corresponds to nature, that is, that corresponds both to one's own nature and to universal nature. [Diogenes, 53]

As stated above, one part of living according to nature involves abiding by moral virtues that are part of human nature. Another part of this, though, involves following the laws of human society, for the ordering principle of the cosmos is so thorough that it even shapes human laws:

> This also means doing none of those things which the common law of humankind typically forbid. The common law is identical with that right reason which pervades everything, being the same with Jupiter, who is the regulator and chief manager of all existing things. [Ibid.]

Thus, the laws of society reflect the rational ordering principle of the cosmos. Ultimately, it is through the use of our human reason that we discover the rational law in nature, ourselves, and society:

> We are to do everything in such a way that the capacity of each individual is in harmony with respect to the will of the universal governor and administrator of all things. This constitutes the virtue of the happy person and the good life. Diogenes [of Babylon], accordingly, says expressly that the chief good is to act according to sound reason in our selection of things according to our nature. [Ibid.]

The second theme in Stoic ethics involves reconciling free will with fate. We've seen from Stoic physics that Fate is always looming over us, and because of that it might seem as though we have no choice as to how we live. If there is no free will, how can I decide to morally improve myself? If my very actions are not within my control, then it seems that I'm not morally responsible for anything that I do, such as stealing a car or failing to pay my credit card bill. However, Stoics do not go this far, and even though they hold that Fate controls everything, they still believe that humans have free wills. Thus, free will is compatible with fate. How so? Fate controls everything outside of human beings—such as the weather, movement of the stars, and other natural events—but not completely what takes place in our thoughts. It's not that our minds defy the natural order of things. Rather, fate sets only the general conditions for how nature operates, but does not micromanage how our thoughts unfold within our minds. One Stoic philosopher explained this with the following analogy:

> It is like a man who pushing a cylinder gives it a principle of motion, but not immediately that of revolution. Similarly an object strikes our sense and conveys its image to our mind, yet leaves us free to form our specific sentiment concerning it. [Cicero, *On Fate*, 19]

According to this analogy, suppose I push a barrel and it rolls down a hill. I am in control of the general force that triggers its motion, but I do not follow the barrel down the hill spinning it with my hands. Its rolling motion owes to the configuration of the barrel itself. Similarly, fate starts natural events in the outside world (like me pushing the barrel), these events strike our senses and create perceptions in our minds. From there on, though, it's the construction of our particular minds that processes those perceptions (like the cylindrical construction of the barrel itself influencing its motion).

Thus, the notion of free will is at least to some extent reconciled with fate. Questions still remain, though, about how strong this notion of free will is. On the one hand, it could be that our minds are just mini-machines that process perceptions according to inflexible rules, and our sense of free will is nothing more than an illusion. On the other hand, it could be that our thoughts operate freely in a little world of their own, isolated from the purely mechanical rules that govern our physical bodies and the world around us. Unfortunately, based on the scanty number of Stoic writings that survive, we don't know which of these two routes they took. All that we can say for sure is that, according to the Stoics, we have some kind of control over our own thoughts, but no control over the events outside of us that are ruled by fate.

Epictetus: Accepting what we Cannot Control

This understanding of free will leads to the third component of Stoic ethics, namely, that we should adjust our attitudes to accept the things outside of us over which we have no control. A Stoic philosopher named Epictetus (c. 55–c. 135) wrote in detail on this subject. A freed slave, he lived in a modest hut with only a mat, a pallet to sleep on, and a clay lamp. His central point is that we should be concerned only with things within our control, which are restricted to our own thoughts, impulses, and desires. At the same time, he argued, we should not be concerned with things outside of our control, such as our bodies, property, reputation, careers; rather, we should learn to accept these things as they come to us. He makes this important distinction here:

> Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, career, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions. The things in our control are by nature free, unrestrained, unhindered; but those not in our control are weak, slavish, restrained, belonging to others. Remember, then, that if you suppose that things which are slavish by nature are also free, and that what belongs to others is your own, then you will be hindered. [Epictetus, *Manual*, 1]

Epictetus's writing style is unusually informal, and he uses picturesque analogies to explain how we should deal with life's most discouraging events. Suppose, for example, that your spouse or family member dies—a traumatic event over which you have no control. How are you supposed to deal with this? He answers this with an analogy of a broken cup:

> With regard to whatever objects give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific cup, remind yourself that it is merely a cup which you are fond of. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child or your wife, say that you only kiss things that are mortal, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies. [Ibid, 3]

His recommendation is that with everything you like, condition yourself to see that it is fragile and can easily be destroyed. Thus, when you drink from your favorite cup, realize that it can easily break. When you kiss a family member, remind yourself that you are kissing a mortal human that could die at any moment. If he or she does die, you will have adjusted to that fact in advance, and thus will not be overly disturbed.

He makes a similar point with another vivid analogy. Imagine that you are a sailor and are on shore leave enjoying things on the beach; at any moment the captain may call you back on board, and thus you must be prepared to let go of the things you enjoy.

> Consider when, on a voyage, your ship is anchored. If you go on shore to get water you may along the way amuse yourself with picking up a shellfish, or a truffle. However, your thoughts and continual attention ought to be bent towards the ship, waiting for the captain to call you back on board. You must then immediately leave all these things, otherwise you will be thrown into the ship, bound neck and feet like a sheep. So it is with life. If, instead of an onion or a shellfish, you are given a wife or child, that is fine. But if the captain calls, you must run

> to the ship, leaving them, and do not concern yourself with them. But if you are old, never go far from the ship, for fear that when you are called you should be unable to come in time. [Ibid, 7]

In this analogy, the captain represents fate, and fate is ultimately in control of things in life that are available for you to enjoy, such as family members. If fate changes plans and separates you from your family, you need to be prepared to let them go.

In addition to being removed from loved ones, another common source of unhappiness is desiring something that we cannot have, such as a family, a good job, or wealth. We should deal with this, Epictetus explains, in the same way that we should when we're at a banquet that has limited amounts of food. Wait until it is your turn to be served, and try to ignore what other people are getting:

> Remember that you must behave in life as at a dinner party. Is anything brought around to you? Put out your hand and take your share with moderation. Does it pass by you? Don't stop it. Is it not yet come? Don't stretch your desire towards it, but wait till it reaches you. Do this with regard to children, to a wife, to careers, to riches, and you will eventually be a worthy partner of the feasts of the gods. And if you don't even take the things which are set before you, but are able even to reject them, then you will not only be a partner at the feasts of the gods, but also of their empire. [Ibid, 15]

The best approach to life, Epictetus suggests, is to be so content with a simple lifestyle that you are willing to even turn down enjoyable things when they come your way.

One last analogy: life is like a dramatic play that you are acting in. Fate assigns you a particular role to play, and it's your moral duty to accept it and act it out, regardless of what it is:

> Remember that you are an actor in a drama which depends upon the judgment of the author. If he wants it short, then it is short; if long, then it is long. If it is his pleasure that you should act a poor man, a cripple, a governor, or a private person, see that you act it naturally. For it is your job to act well the role that is assigned you; it is another's job to choose your role. [Ibid, 17]

This analogy encapsulates the overarching message of Stoic ethics: as a mere actor in a play, you are at the mercy of the author who directs you as he sees fit, so get used to it.

D. SKEPTICISM

A fourth major philosophical school of the Hellenistic period was skepticism, which, as its name implies, emphasized doubting everything, specifically as a means of becoming tranquil and happy. At the time there were two distinct schools of Greek skepticism. One, called *Academic skepticism*, originated within the philosophical school of the Academy, founded by Plato. While Plato himself was as anti-skeptical as any philosopher could be, within a few generations after his death his followers transformed the Academy into a stronghold of skepticism.

The second school, and the one that we will focus on here, was called *Pyrrhonism* after its founder Pyrrho (c.365-c.275 BCE). Pyrrho was not connected with the Academy. He was a painter from the Greek coastal city of Elis and is reported to have traveled with Alexander the Great to India, where he studied with scholars and mystics. The core of his philosophical views was that we should suspend judgment on every matter, and Pyrrho tried to practice what he preached. Even distrusting his senses, people would have to steer him clear of wagons, ledges, dogs. He was once traveling in a ship during a tumultuous storm, and passengers were gripped with terror. Pyrrho, though, remained calm and, pointing to a pig on board who was oblivious to the dangers, he said that this was the undisturbed state that we should all hope to achieve. If someone left Pyrrho in the middle of a conversation, he would continue speaking even when no one was there to hear him. A student of his once fell into a pond, and Pyrrho just walked by without helping him. The student later praised Pyrrho for this since it showed an indifference and absence of all emotion. Once when undergoing surgery, he didn't flinch when the physician cut into him. However, on one occasion a dog attacked him by surprised, and he quickly climbed up a tree to escape. Someone then criticized him for losing his composure, and Pyrrho replied "It is difficult to entirely suppress human nature, but we should nonetheless strive hard to neutralize situations with our actions if possible, and certainly with one's reason." He lived with his sister and did the housecleaning without complaining—a remarkable thing for a man to do at that time—and once patiently washed a pig. In spite of his odd and distant behavior, people thought fondly of him.

Though we have some reports of the contents of Pyrrho's teaching, he authored nothing and the writings of his

early students no longer exist. However, the Pyrrhonian school thrived for many centuries and we fortunately have works by a later Pyrrhonian philosopher and medical doctor named Sextus Empiricus (fl. 200 CE). His main book, a lengthy treatise titled *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, gives a detailed description and defense of Pyrrhonian skepticism.

Skepticism and Tranquility

Sextus argues that there are essentially three kinds of philosophies. One, which he calls *dogmatic*, consists of philosophers such as Aristotle and the Stoics who claimed to have found truth. A second kind of philosophy is that of Plato's Academy, which claims to be skeptical, but does not go far enough. The third kind is *Pyrrhonism*, which makes no claims about truth at all. He defines true skepticism as follows:

> Skepticism is an ability to place appearances in opposition to judgments in any way whatever. By balancing reasons that are opposed to each other, we first reach the state of suspension of judgment, and afterwards that of tranquility. [Sextus, *Outlines*, 1.4]

This basic definition provides all the ingredients of how skeptics approach knowledge, truth, and even life itself. The starting point is recognizing that there are always two or more conflicting ways of perceiving anything. I say something looks red, you say it looks blue. I say something is good, you say it is bad. Every assessment that I make can conflict with a rival assessment. How, then, should we decide such issues? The answer is that we should not make a decision either way and instead just suspend our judgment. Sextus writes,

> Suspension of judgment occurs by placing things in opposition to each other. We either place appearances in opposition to appearances, or thoughts in opposition to thoughts, or some combination of these. For example, we place appearances in opposition to appearances when we say that this tower appears round from a distance but square when nearby. [Ibid, 1.13]

We regularly face decisions in life where we just have to say "I don't know". According to skeptics, we should say this about everything.

An especially interesting aspect of Pyrrhonian skepticism, which we see at the close of the above definition, is that by suspending judgment and doubting everything we can attain tranquility and happiness. So, what is the connection between doubt and tranquility? If I claim to know that something is true, I immediately open the door for an opposing view, or a debate with someone on the issue, or simply create turmoil within my own mind as I reflect on the alternatives. We commonly find this when debating with others on politics and morality. I can instantly put an end to all the wrangling if I just suspend my judgment. I'll be more tranquil, and thus happier. Several of the above stories about Pyrrho's life illustrate his efforts to achieve tranquility through doubt, such as his continuing to speak even after everyone has walked away, apparently remaining neutral on whether anyone was there for him to converse with. In this way, Pyrrhonian skepticism offered a vision of happiness and the good life that rivaled the Epicurean emphasis on pleasure and the Stoic emphasis on resigning oneself to fate.

The Ten Methods

Early on in the development of Pyrrhonian skepticism, philosophers of this school formulated different arguments to show that everything imaginable can and should be doubted. The arguments settled into ten specific methods or patterns of skeptical reasoning. The underlying concept of each is that, for any so-called truth that you pick, there are different and conflicting ways of viewing it, neither of which we can prefer above the other. Thus, we must suspend belief about that so-called truth. Sextus lists the ten Methods here:

> Certain Methods were commonly handed down by the older Skeptics, by means of which suspension of judgment seems to take place. They are ten in number, and are synonymously called "arguments" and "points." They are these: (1) the method based upon the differences in animals; (2) that upon the differences in people; (3) that upon the difference in the constitution of the organs of sense; (4) that upon differing circumstances; (5) that upon differing position, distance, and place; (6) that upon differing mixtures; (7) that upon differing quantity and constitution of objects; (8) that upon differing relations; (9) that upon differing frequency or rarity of occurrences; (10) that upon differing systems, customs, laws, mythical beliefs, and dogmatic opinions. I have made this order myself. [Ibid, 1.14]

All of the Methods follow the same argument structure, which we can illustrate with the first one on the above list: differences in animals. For example, a dog perceives a ball as yellow, but a cow perceives the same ball as red; since the dog's perception doesn't have any more authority than the cow's, and vice verse, we must suspend belief about whether the ball is yellow or red. More generally, the argument structure here is this:

(1) An object appears to have quality X to a dog.
(2) The same object appears to have quality Y to a cow.
(3) We cannot prefer the dog to the cow.
(4) Therefore, we suspend judgment as to whether the object has quality X or Y.

Sextus supports his claim about the perceptual differences in animals with a variety of biological examples, many of which still hold true by today's scientific standards. He argues that the different sensory perceptions of animals owe to "the different origin of the animals, and also from the difference in the constitutions of their bodies." He writes,

> For how can it be said that shellfish, birds of prey, animals covered with spines, those with feathers and those with scales would be affected in the same way by the sense of touch? And how can the sense of hearing perceive alike in animals which have the narrowest auditory passages, and in those that are furnished with the widest, or in those with hairy ears and those with smooth ones? For even humans hear differently when we partially stop up the ears, from what we do when we use them naturally. [Ibid, 1.14]

We might feel that our own perceptions as human beings have more authority than the perceptions of various animals. But this too is a mistake: "We have no evidence according to which we can give preference to our own ideas over those of so-called irrational animals." Human sensory perceptions are just one among many differing sorts in the animal kingdom. Thus, Sextus concludes, "since ideas differ according to the difference in animals, and it is impossible to judge them, it is necessary to suspend the judgment in regard to external objects."

The remaining nine Methods follow the same general structure as this first one regarding animals. For example, Method two regarding the differences between people is this:

(1) An object appears to have quality X to me.
(2) The same object appears to have quality Y to you.
(3) We cannot prefer my perception to yours.
(4) Therefore, we suspend judgment as to whether the object has quality X or Y.

Method three compares how two different sense organs, such as sight and touch, give us different perceptions of the same object; we can't prefer one sense organ over another, thus we suspend judgment about the qualities that the object actually has. And so on. Using these ten Methods, skeptics cast doubt on every possible assertion that someone might make, and undermine any possible standard of truth. Not only do they cast doubt on the qualities of the things that we perceive, they also question more fundamental assumptions about the world, such as whether one thing causes another, whether something is moving, and whether something can be created.

Perhaps the most controversial of the ten Modes is the last one regarding "differing systems, customs, laws, mythical beliefs, and dogmatic opinions." This focuses specifically on the different religious and ethical views that people have. Societies differ in their views about the existence and nature of God, and we can't prefer one society's views to another. Thus, we must suspend belief about God's existence and nature. Similarly, societies differ about what actions are right and wrong; thus we must suspend belief about whether such actions are actually right or wrong. This reiterates the issue of relativism first raised by Presocratic philosophers, such as Protagoras who famously stated that "Man is the measure of all things." According to Pyrrhonian skeptics, all value judgments of religion and morality are creations of human culture. Here are just a few of Sextus' many examples of culturally relative values that differing societies hold:

> Some of the Ethiopians tattoo new-born children, but we do not. The Persians think it is appropriate to have a garment of many colors reaching to the feet, but we think it is inappropriate. People from India have sex with their women in public, but most of the other nations find that shameful. . . . Thus, seeing so great a diversity of practices, the skeptic suspends judgment as to the natural existence of anything good or bad, or generally to be done. [Ibid, 1.14]

From this cultural diversity of values, Sextus concludes that "the skeptic suspends judgment as to the natural existence of anything good or bad, or generally to be done." That is, the skeptic withholds judgment about the existence of any objective foundation of values. Of the few surviving summaries of Pyrrho's teachings, we find that he too denies the objective truth behind values, seeing them instead as a matter of cultural customs:

> Nothing is honorable or disgraceful, just unjust. And similarly, in every case there is no such thing as downright truth. Rather, people do everything in consequence of custom and law, for nothing is any more this than that. [Diogenes, "Pyrrho," 3]

Skepticism and Inconsistency

Skeptics were often criticized by rival philosophical schools for being inconsistent with itself. We'll consider two versions of this attack, which even today are common attacks on skepticism. The first is that skepticism's assertions are self-contradictory. That is, skepticism's central position is "doubt everything," but this is an assertion that skeptics themselves do not doubt. Similarly, by refuting other positions, skeptics themselves dogmatically make claims about the truth. Skeptics also make dogmatic claims about the truth when holding that every view can be opposed by another view. Indeed, if the skeptic takes seriously his own recommendation "doubt everything", then the skeptic must doubt his own position. Skeptics were well aware of these criticisms and gave the following response to them:

> To this the Skeptics reply that they only use reason as an instrument, because it is impossible to overturn the authority of reason without using reason. Similarly if we assert that "there is no such thing as space," we must use the word "space," but using it not dogmatically, but demonstratively. Again, if we assert that "nothing exists according to necessity," it is unavoidable that we use the word "necessity." [Diogenes, "Pyrrho," 8]

The point is that by skeptically attacking the dogmatic assertions of others, skeptics have no choice but to use the vocabulary and methods of reasoning of the dogmatists themselves. If you assert that the ball in front of you is red, in order to refute you I need to enter into your dialogue and use your own notions of logic and reason to show that you're wrong. The entire "theory" of skepticism is a tool to refute dogmatic assertions of truth on its own grounds.

A second version of the criticism of skepticism is that skeptics refute themselves in their very lives as they move around the world and talk about the things they see. They recognize that they are alive, that it is daytime, and they go about their daily routines. Their very behavior is an assertion of truths that we all accept. In response, skeptics concede that they have normal perceptions and understandings about the world they live in. Sextus argued that the day-to-day life of the skeptic observes normal appearances in four ways: (1) the guidance of nature in what we perceive and think, (2) the necessity of feelings such as hunger and thirst, (3) the tradition of laws and of customs regarding right and wrong conduct, and (4) the teaching of skills such as our jobs would require. Still, skeptics insist on suspending judgment about the nature of what they perceive:

> We certainly do know that it is day, and that we are alive, and we admit that we know many other of the phenomena of life. . . . We confess that we see, and we are aware that we comprehend that such a thing is the fact, but we do not know how we see, or how we comprehend. . . . We assert what is actually the fact, but we do not describe its character. Again, we feel that fire burns, but we suspend our judgment as to whether it has a burning nature. [Diogenes, "Pyrrho," 11]

The same goes for the language that skeptic's use when describing ordinary things in the world. While they speak normally when saying something like "the snow on the hill looks white," they say that they state this merely in a manner of speaking, without asserting positively that it really is so.

E. NEOPLATONISM

The final school that we will examine is Neoplatonism, which emerged during Roman times well after the Hellenistic period, but was still very Greek-like and developed in the context of Hellenistic thought. Neoplatonism holds that there is a single source of all reality from which every existing thing radiates, like rays radiating out from the sun. At the time, philosophers of this school saw themselves simply as Platonists, that is followers of Plato's philosophy. The word "Neoplatonism" is a recently devised term, which indicates that these philosophers adapted Plato's theory, rather than just followed it. While several philosophers are classified as Neoplatonists, there is one undisputed leader: Plotinus

(204-270 CE).

Plotinus and Plato's Influence

Born in a Hellenized region of Egypt, in his twenties Plotinus studied philosophy in the city of Alexandria, one of the ancient world's great centers of learning with its renowned library. He later joined the Roman army and set out with it on an expedition to Persia where he hoped to meet philosophers. The expedition was called off, though, and with difficulty he returned west and settled in Rome where he remained most of his life. At around 40 he established his own philosophical school, first lecturing on what he learned in Alexandria and later moving beyond that. He taught in a conversational style, and spent much time answering questions from his students and reading works of various philosophers. He attracted many followers, including a couple Roman senators. He was so well-regarded that when several older students died they left their children and property under Plotinus's care, which he managed with great ability. In spite of his gentle disposition, Plotinus had a jealous rival in Rome who tried to harm him through acts of sorcery. However, every spell that the rival cast against Plotinus seemingly bounced back to harm the rival himself, so he gave up. By the time of his death from diphtheria at age 66, Plotinus had written 54 separate treatises, hastily composed with poor penmanship and no rewriting. He entrusted these documents to a close student of his named Porphyry, who subsequently edited them all into a single lengthy work that he titled the *Enneads*. The term is Greek for "nine", and represents Porphyry's division of the 54 treatises into six groups of nine.

Plotinus was heavily influenced by Plato, and the *Enneads* is packed with references to him. In fact, Plato figures so prominently in Plotinus's writings that, when copies of Plato's grew scarce and virtually disappeared, for hundreds of years scholars viewed Plotinus's *Enneads* as simply a summary of Plato's ideas. We now know that Plotinus's views are different than Plato's, but because of this mistake of identity, Plotinus's philosophy skyrocketed in popularity during the middle ages. There are three distinct aspects of Plato's thought that shaped Plotinus's views. First is Plato's matter-spirit dualism: the universe is comprised of both a material-realm and a spirit-realm. The spirit realm houses the perfect Forms that are the source of all truth and reality. The material-realm, by contrast, is an inferior world that poorly copies the Forms. Second is Plato's body-soul dualism: the body entombs the soul, and upon death our souls rise to the higher spirit realm of truth and perfection. Third is Plato's view of the Good: it is the form of perfection that illuminates everything else in the universe, just as the sun illuminates the world. Plotinus, we will see, develops each of these three themes in a unique way.

The central point of Plotinus's philosophy is that all levels of reality emanate from the One, and to understand this it helps to keep in mind the above mentioned metaphor of the sun's rays, which Plotinus adapted from Plato and regularly used. Think of the sun blazing out rays of light in all directions. The center of the sun is the brightest and purest part of it, and as you move further away the sun's rays grow dimmer and dimmer. Finally, when you are so far removed from the sun that there is no light at all, there is only darkness. Similarly, the One is pure being and from it radiates all the levels of reality, with those closest to the One being most perfect, and those furthest away the least perfect. Beyond that is simply non-being, sort of like absolute darkness. Everything that exists, then, lies somewhere on a spectrum between the pure being of the One at one extreme, and nonbeing at the other extreme.

An initial question that we might raise about the One is why it radiates anything at all? Recall a contrasting view of the One held by Parmenides, the Presocratic philosopher: the One is the only thing that exists, it has no parts or movement, and doesn't produce anything. Plotinus does not go this route and instead maintains that the One radiates other levels of reality. The reason is that the nature of *any* existing thing is for it to radiate something, whether it's fire radiating heat, or flowers radiating fragrances. Thus, the One radiates something too. He writes,

> All existences, as long as they retain their character, produce about themselves, from their essence, in virtue of the power which must be in them some necessary, outward-facing hypostasis [i.e., underlying reality] continuously attached to them and representing in image the producing archetypes. Thus fire gives out its heat; snow is cold not merely to itself; fragrant substances are a notable instance; for, as long as they last, something is diffused from them and perceived wherever they are present. [*Enneads*, 5.1.6]

The above quote uses the term "hypostasis", a Greek term meaning underlying reality. Plotinus's point is that all things radiate some underlying reality; so too, then, does the One radiate—or emanate—underlying layers of reality.

Divine Triad: The One, Intellect, Soul

According to Plotinus, God consists of the first three levels of reality, from the center of the One outward, similar to the center of the sun plus two levels of the sun's corona. God, then, is a *divine triad*. The reason for this is that the first

levels of emanation from the One are so close to it, that it retains the divine element of the One. The three elements of the divine triad are the One itself, Intellect, and Soul. Let's look at each of these.

The One is pure undifferentiated unity and the cause of everything. Following Plato, Plotinus sometimes refers to it as the Good. Because of its pure and indivisible nature, however, it is impossible to directly describe it with words. Imagine that you stood before an intensely bright light that filled your complete visual range. While you might be able to describe how it makes you feel, you wouldn't be able to give details about the light itself. In the following, Plotinus graphically describes the unspeakable nature of the One:

> The One, as above knowledge, is above knowing. Above all need, it is above the need of the knowing which pertains solely to [things that have a] secondary nature. . . . Thus the One is in truth beyond all statement: any affirmation is of a thing; but the all-transcending, resting above even the grandest divine Intellect, possesses alone of all true being, and is not a thing among things; we can give it no name because that would imply predication: we can but try to indicate, in our own feeble way, something concerning it: when in our perplexity we object, "Then it is without self-perception, without self-consciousness, ignorant of itself"; we must remember that we have been considering it only in its opposites. If we make it knowable, an object of affirmation, we make it a multiplicity; and if we allow knowledge in it we make it at that point indigent: supposing that in fact intellection accompanies it, intellection by it must be superfluous. [Ibid, 5.3.12, 13]

While we can give no concrete description of the One, we still have some limited understanding of it that we can put into words. He writes,

> How, then, do we ourselves speak about it? No doubt we deal with it, but we do not state it; we have neither knowledge nor thought of it. But in what sense do we even deal with it when we have no hold upon it? We do not, it is true, grasp it by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly void of it. We hold it not so as to state it, but so as to be able to speak about it. And we can and do state what it is not, while we are silent as to what it is. We are, In fact, speaking of it in the light of what comes after it. Unable to state it, we may still possess it. [Ibid, 14]

According to the above, we can indirectly describe the One in either of two ways. First we can state what the One is not, while remaining silent about what it is. Later philosophers refer to such a description of the divine as *the way of negation*. For example, when viewing a basketball, I can say that it is not square, or triangular, or green, or blue. Eventually, by saying enough If we try to say anything positive about what the One is, we will inevitably misdescribe and distort it, such as if we say that it is powerful or conscious. For Plotinus, we can't even assert the positive fact that the One exists. The safer alternative is to list the things that the One is not. For instance, we can say that the One has no physical form and that it has no parts. Second, we can know something about the One through examining the next level of reality that it produces, namely, the divine Intellect.

Turning next to the divine *Intellect*, this is a part of the divine triad that we can describe since it has separate parts to it, unlike the One which has no parts. Among the parts of the Intellect are the Platonic Forms—that is, the unchanging abstract objects (such as justice, roundness, tableness), which serve as perfect models for the imperfect particular things in the physical world. The collection of Forms constitutes every eternal truth that could possibly exist. In a sense, the divine Intellect *thinks* about all of these Forms, thereby giving a logical organization to all reality which relies on these abstract truths. While the divine Intellect is one step removed from the One, it nevertheless contains much of the character of the One itself. He writes, "The greatest, after the One, must be Intellect. It must be the second of all existence, for it is that which sees the One on which alone it leans, while the One itself has no need whatever of it."

Moving on to the third part of the divine triad, the divine *Soul* is produced by the divine Intellect, and is thus two steps removed from the One. Because of this distance from the One, there is some degeneration of quality to it—like making a photocopy of a photocopy. He writes,

> In Soul the expression [of the Intellect from which it originates] is obscured, for Soul is a ghostly image of the Intellect. Intellect, on the other hand, looks to the One without reflection, thus becoming what it is. It has that vision of the One, not as from a distance but by being immediately next to it, with nothing in between it. Intellect is as close to the One as Soul to Intellect. [Ibid]

While the divine Intellect *thinks* about the Forms that it possesses, the divine Soul in its more obscured state *desires* the perfect Forms that it does not possess. It's as though the Soul is thinking, if I can't possess the perfect Form of roundness, then by golly I'll just make my own round thing out of this material stuff. Thus, in the Soul's state of desire for the Forms, it produces particular things that copy the Forms, such as a round rock that copies the form "roundness", or a just person that copies the form "justice". Plotinus says "Soul, as an activity proceeding from Intellect, is in labor to create after the Forms which it sees in Intellect and from this desire the whole world arises and takes shape" (4.7.13). In this way, the divine Soul creates the natural world, and all the physical and living things it contains, temporarily ignoring its divine and immaterial nature. Material stuff itself is pliable and can take on the shape of any of the Forms.

At this point, the material world is three steps removed from the One, and is so degenerated that almost nothing of the One is preserved in material things. The material world is like the very last glimpses of the sun's rays before entering total darkness; it is the very last level of reality just before nonbeing. All the evil that we see in the world around us owes to the fact that material things are so far removed from the divine nature, crumbling away as it touches the boundaries of nonexistence. Because of the material world's distance from the One, the evil that we see results from the absence of divine goodness. That is, it is not as though evil is the creation of a special malevolent being or force. Evil simply is the absence of good, just as darkness is the absence of light.

Returning to the Beauty of the One

Where do human beings fit into this grand divine scheme of the cosmos? According to Plotinus, there are two parts to the human soul, a higher and a lower. The higher part of my soul resides within the divine Intellect and has direct awareness of the perfect Forms; the lower part is trapped within my body in the material world, and strives to be released from it. Just as Plato deplored the human body, so too did Plotinus. In fact, we have this description of Plotinus's gloomy view of his own body:

> Plotinus, the philosopher and our contemporary, seemed ashamed of being in the body. So deeply rooted was this feeling that he could never be induced to tell of his ancestry, his parentage, or his birthplace. He showed, too, an unconquerable reluctance to sit to a painter of a sculptor, and when Amelius persisted in urging him to allow of a portrait being made he asked him, "Is it not enough to carry about this image in which nature has enclosed us? Do you really think I must also consent to leave, as a desired spectacle to posterity, an image of the image?" [Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*]

Thus, while I am alive and the lower part of my soul is trapped within my body, I have an inward striving to ascend to my proper place within the divine Intellect. Ultimately, this will occur when I die. Plotinus himself, when on his deathbed, said "I will now try to make that which is divine in me rise up to that which is divine in the universe" (ibid). But while I'm still here on earth, through a mystical experience I can recognize and ascend to my true divine state:

> We must ascend again towards the [divine] Good, the object of desire of every Soul. Anyone that has seen the Good, knows what I mean when I say that it is beautiful. Even the desire of it is to be desired as a good. Attaining it is a task for those that will take the upward path, who will set all their forces towards it, who will rid themselves of all that we have put on in our descent. [*Enneads*, 1:6:7.]

To take the upward path towards the divine Good, we must strip away everything about us that pertains to our material existence, including those pleasures in life that made us happy and the things that we might find physically beautiful. These, according to Plotinus, are only images of reality. Instead, we must return to our true place of birth. We cannot obviously get there by foot and we can't even get there through the use of human reason. Instead, we must have an inner vision of the beauty of divine Goodness. To do this, we must first look within ourselves and find the inner beauty of the One that is there in its very limited state:

> Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiseling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendor of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine. [Ibid, 9]

Once we're capable of seeing divine goodness within ourselves, we will have the right kind of spiritual eyes and can them cast our gaze upward to see the beauty within the divine Intellect. He writes,

> When you know that you have become this perfect work, when you are self-gathered in the purity of your being, nothing now remains that can shatter that inner unity. . . . When you see that you have become this, then you have become sight. You can trust yourself and have already ascended and need no one to show you. Concentrate your gaze and see. This is the only eye that sees the mighty Beauty. . . . So, rising, the Soul will come first to the divine Intellect and survey all the beautiful Forms in the Supreme and will affirm that this is Beauty, that the Ideas are Beauty. For by their efficacy comes all Beauty else, but the offspring and essence of the Intellect. What is beyond the Intellect we affirm to be the nature of Good radiating Beauty before it. [Ibid]

By seeing the vision of divine goodness, we will experience a union with the divine. We will have no experience of our individual selves and be in a state of tranquility and ecstasy.

Plotinus's philosophy is perhaps best classified as pantheism, the view that the entire cosmos is identical to God. But it is different from the earlier Presocratic pantheistic notions of Xenophanes and Parmenides. For Plotinus, all existence—even the material world—is part of the One and its radiance, although some parts are more purely divine than others. Pantheistic-minded philosophers in later centuries looked to Plotinus for inspiration. However, even those who rejected pantheism were drawn to three particular aspects of Plotinus's thought. First is the idea that things radiate or emanate from God, particularly divine knowledge or wisdom. Second is the notion that we can only give negative descriptions of God. Third is that evil results from the absence of good.

F. CONCLUSION

The Hellenistic philosophies that we have looked at in this chapter emerged before the views of Plato and Aristotle achieved dominance, and thus the newcomers were very much the rivals of the old masters. Epicureanism and Stoicism were especially popular in Roman times. Some philosophers of the day, not content with following any particular one of these schools, blended the views of many to suit their needs, thus creating yet another philosophical approach called Eclecticism. The complete range of Greek philosophies—from the Presocratics on through Plotinus—presented an almost unimaginable variety of theories, which only the most gifted philosophers since then have been able to improve upon. When we speak of the philosophical tradition of Western civilization, it is largely in reference to the outgrowth of this collection of Greek theories.

As distinct schools of thought, though, the five Hellenistic philosophies disappeared with the emergence of Christianity and its status as the official religion within the Roman Empire. While components of the Hellenistic philosophies could be incorporated into early Christian doctrine, the overall thrust of many of these was contrary to Church teaching. There was no place for Cynical defiance of social norms, Epicurean emphasis on pleasure, Stoic fatalism, and Skeptical doubt. Plotinus's philosophy was the only one that was widely embraced by Christian philosophers.

The decline of these schools also meant the disappearance of the vast majority of their writings, and it wasn't until the Renaissance one thousand years later that philosophers attempted to revive their teachings, with varying degrees of success. In more recent centuries, Cynicism's lack of structure has prevented it from becoming a viable social philosophy. While Stoic logic has ultimately triumphed over Aristotle's syllogistic logic, its view of an impersonal fatalistic deity continues to be at odds with the popular notion of a personal God. By the 19th century, Plotinus's brand of mystical pantheism became eclipsed by more accessible Eastern philosophies. Ultimately, it was Epicureanism and Skepticism that have best endured, and continue to have an important impact on contemporary philosophy. Epicureanism survives in the form of its direct descendent, utilitarianism, which is one of the leading ethical theories today. Skepticism is a dominant component in contemporary theories of knowledge, and the skeptical arguments of the Ten Methods are timeless.

READING 1: LUCIAN'S "PHILOSOPHERS FOR SALE"

Introduction: The following are additional selections from Lucian's "Philosophers for Sale", this time on Hellenistic philosophers.

Diogenes the Cynic

Hermes: Will we put up that unwashed-looking fellow from Pontus next?

Zeus: Yes, he'll do.

Hermes: You there, the bare-armed fellow with the handbag. Come and walk around the auction room. A fine virile character this, gentlemen, grand and noble and a true freeman. Who buys?

Customer: What's this now? Are you selling a freeman?

Hermes: Oh, by all means.

Customer: Are you not afraid he may bring an action for kidnapping against you, and summon you before the Areopagus?

Hermes: Oh, being sold is nothing to him: he thinks himself free under all circumstances whatsoever.

Customer: But what possible use could one make of such a dirty, wretched-looking creature. Maybe digging or carrying water?

Hermes: That is not all he is fit for. If you were to make a doorkeeper of him, for instance, you would find him more trustworthy than any dog. Indeed, Dog is the name he actually goes by.

Customer: Where does he come from? What does he profess to be his way of life?

Hermes: Ask him yourself. That will be the most effective thing to do.

Customer: But I don't like his surly hang-dog look. I 'm afraid he may growl at me if I go near him. Indeed, upon my word, he looks as though he might bite too. Don't you see how he is fidgeting with that stick of his, and how he scowls, and what angry threatening looks he casts at us from under his brows?

Hermes: Don't be afraid; he is quite tame.

Customer: Well, in the first place, my good man, what country do you belong to?

Diogenes: Every country.

Customer: What do you mean by that?

Diogenes: I mean I am a citizen of the universe.

Customer: Are you a follower of any master?

Diogenes: Yes, of Hercules.

Customer: Then why don't you also wear the lion's skin? For I see you have a club like his.

Diogenes: Here it is, my threadbare cloak is my lion's skin. Like Hercules, I spend my life in warfare, but it is against pleasures that I contend, and that not at anyone's command, but of my own free will. The task to which I have devoted myself is the thorough cleansing of human life.

Customer: An excellent object, certainly. But what is your particular branch of knowledge? What is the art which you profess?

Diogenes: I am the liberator of mankind, and the healer of the passions. In a word, I profess myself the apostle of truth and plain speaking.

Customer: Well, apostle, if I buy you, what will be your method of teaching me?

Diogenes: First, I will take you and strip off your habits of luxury, and immediately confine you to poverty, and put a ragged cloak upon you. Then I will force you to toil and labor, to sleep on the ground, to drink nothing but water, and eat anything that comes to hand; and if you have any money, you will throw it into the sea at my bidding. You must care nothing for wife, or children, or country; all such things must be empty vanity in your eyes. You will leave your father's house, and live in some tomb or deserted tower, or even, perhaps, in a tub. Your wallet will be full of lupines, and parchments covered with writing on both sides. In this condition you will declare that you live in more happiness and enjoyment than any Eastern ruler; and if anyone should whip or torture you, you are not to look on this as anything painful or distressing.

Customer: What do you mean? Not feel pain if I am beaten! My good man, do you think I have a shell like a tortoise or a lobster?

Diogenes: You can adapt that verse by Euripides, you know, and make it your own [i.e., "My tongue swore the oath, but my mind remained unsworn"].

Customer: What verse?

Diogenes: You can say, "My mind is pained, but my tongue will not own it." But the most necessary qualifications are these: you must be headstrong and insolent, and indulge in abuse of everybody indiscriminately—kings and commons alike; in this way you will make yourself conspicuous, and be looked on as a fine virile character. Your way of speaking must be rude, and your voice discordant and disagreeable like a dog's; your face must look harsh and rigid, and your gait must match it; in short, your whole manner and appearance must be brute-like and boorish. As for modesty, or decency, or moderation—away with anything of the sort —such a thing as a blush you must utterly banish from your face. Then you must seek out the most frequented places, and when you are there, make a point of

being solitary and unsociable; you must let neither friend nor stranger approach you, for that sort of thing is the rain of your dominion. Then you must boldly do in public what most people would be ashamed to do in private; your love affairs, again, must be of the most ridiculous character; and in the end you may die, if you like, by choking yourself with a raw octopus or a squid. This is the life of happiness to which I will introduce you.

Customer: Be off with you! This system of yours is absolutely revolting and unnatural.

Diogenes: All the same, it is an easy one, my good man, and anybody can easily shine in it. You see, you don't need culture, or learning, or rubbish of that sort; so it is a fine short cut to distinction. Even supposing you are absolutely without education—-a tanner, say, or a salt-fish huckster, or a carpenter, or a money-changer—there nothing to prevent your gaining fame and admiration, only you have shamelessness and brazen impudence, and a happy knack of indiscriminate abuse.

Customer: Well, I 'm afraid I can make no use of you as an instructor. But perhaps someday you would do as a boatman or an under-gardener; and if they will sell you for two obols, I will give that for you, but no more.

Hermes: Please, take him on any terms you like. We are quite glad to get rid of him; he is so troublesome, roaring and shouting and insulting everybody all round, and calling us all names.

Epicurus

Hermes: Now, Epicurus, I'll call you. Who'll buy this one? He is a disciple of that laughing fellow there, and of the drunkard that we put up a short time ago. His knowledge is superior to theirs in one point however, for he is more of an unbeliever. As for his other qualities, I may say he is a pleasant companion and a great lover of good living.

Customer: What is your price for him?

Hermes: Two minae.

Customer: There you are, but, by the way, you might let me know what he likes best to eat?

Hermes: Oh, anything sweet and tasting like honey. Figs in particular.

Customer: Well, there is no difficulty about that. I will get him slabs of those cheap pressed figs from Caria.

Chrysippus the Stoic

Zeus: Now call up another, that one with the cropped head, I mean the ugly-looking fellow that came from the Painted Porch, you know.

Hermes: That is a good idea, for I think quite a number of people have come here on purpose to buy him, and are only waiting till we come to him. Now, gentlemen, here is the choicest and most perfect lot of all. I offer you Virtue itself for sale—nothing less. Who wants to have all knowledge for his sole possession?

Customer: What do you mean?

Hermes: I mean that you have before you the only wise man. He alone is handsome, just, or noble; he is the only true king, orator, rich man, lawgiver, or anything else.

Customer: Then am I to understand that he is also the only true cook? By Jove, perhaps he is also the one leather worker or carpenter, and, in short, the one tradesman of any kind?

Hermes: So it would seem.

Customer: Well, come now, my good man, since I propose to buy you, tell me what sort of person you are, and in the first place whether you do not bitterly resent being put up for sale as a slave?

Chrysippus. Not at all. These things are not in our power, and if a thing is not in our power, it follows that it is a matter of indifference,

Customer: I don't understand what you mean.

Chrysippus: What? Don't you understand that of such things some are relatively preferable, while others, again, are the reverse?

Customer: I don't follow your meaning even now.

Chrysippus: Very likely you don't, because you are not accustomed to our phraseology, and, moreover, you lack the faculty of apprehension. But the virtuous man, and he who has mastered the theory of logic, not only knows all this, but can also tell the nature of symbama and parasymbama, and how they differ from one another.

Customer: Dear me! I beg you, in the name of philosophy herself, do not refuse to tell me one thing more. What exactly are symbama and parasymbama? Somehow I find an extraordinary charm in the mere sound of these two words.

Chrysippus: I will tell you with pleasure. Suppose a lame man would strike his lame foot against a stone, and so receive a wound. Then his lameness is a symbama, and the wound he gets in addition is a parasymbama.

Customer: Heavens, what extraordinary acuteness of mind! What other wonderful things do you know?

Chrysippus: I understand the art of weaving meshes of words in which I entangle those who converse with me,

and hedge them in. In fact, I reduce them to silence by fairly muzzling them. The means by which I accomplish this is the famous device of the Syllogism.

Customer: Good gracious, what an irresistible and powerful instrument!

Chrysippus: Yes, indeed. To illustrate, do you have a son?

Customer: Why do you ask?

Chrysippus: Suppose a crocodile were to catch him playing around a river bank and carry him off, and then promise to return him to you on condition that you guess correctly what he really means to do, that is, whether to give back the child or not. What would you say he had determined on?

Customer: That is a hard question. Indeed, I am at a loss to see how I could possibly answer. Please, in Heaven's name, answer for me and save my child, otherwise the crocodile will eat him up before the answer is given. . . . Still, I think I will buy you. How much do you want for him?

Hermes: Twelve minae.

Customer: Here is your money.

Pyrrho the Skeptic

Zeus: Who is left now?

Hermes: The Sceptic here. You, Pyrrho, come out and let me put you up for sale. Look sharp, for the attendance is getting thin, and there will only be a few to offer. Well, gentlemen, which of you will buy this lot?

Customer: I will. But first tell me, my man, what do you know?

Pyrrho: Nothing at all.

Customer: What do you mean?

Pyrrho: I mean that I do not feel certain that anything has any existence.

Customer: Then are we here nobody at all?

Pyrrho: I cannot be certain.

Customer: Don't you even know whether you yourself are something?

Pyrrho: I am even more in the dark on that point.

Customer: My goodness! what uncertainty! But what have you got these scales for?

Pyrrho: I weigh the arguments on both sides of a question in them. When I see they are exactly alike, and equally poised, then I find myself absolutely uncertain as to which of them contains the truth.

Customer: But how about ordinary things? Is there anything else you can do?

Pyrrho: Oh, anything, except pursuing a runaway.

Customer: Why can't you do that?

Pyrrho: Because, my dear sir, I can apprehend nothing.

Customer: That's likely enough since you do look a bit dull and slow. But to what is the aim of your teaching tend?

Pyrrho: To knowing nothing, and to hearing and seeing nothing.

Customer: To being deaf and blind, do you mean?

Pyrrho: Yes, and to being without judgment, or perception, and, in fact, to differ in no respect from an earthworm.

Customer: Well, this certainly makes you worth buying. How much is he supposed to be worth?

Hermes: One Attic mina.

Customer: Here it is. Well, friend, what do you say? Have I bought you or not?

Pyrrho: That is a matter of uncertainty.

Customer: Not at all. I have bought and paid for you.

Pyrrho: I must suspend my judgment on that point, and make inquiry into it.

Customer: Well, follow me, anyway, as my slave should.

Pyrrho: Who knows if what you say is true or not?

Customer: The salesman there, and the mina I paid, and all here present?

Pyrrho: Is anybody present?

Customer: I'll send you to the grinding mill this very day, and convince you by that argument that your master really does exists.

Pyrrho: Perhaps you should suspend your judgment on that point.

Customer: Not a chance. I've pronounced it already.

Hermes: Now then, give up resisting, and go with your purchaser. Gentlemen, we invite you to attend again

tomorrow, when we will offer a miscellaneous assortment of uneducated persons, mechanics and other ordinary people of that sort.

READING 2: LUCRETIUS ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS (Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*)

Introduction: Most philosophers of the ancient world believed in some type of divine being or spiritual realm, even if their conceptions were not entirely traditional. An exception to this, though, was Epicurus and his followers who held to a strictly materialistic view of the cosmos that ruled out human and divine spirits. In the selections below, offers three arguments against the immortality of the human soul/mind based on it unbreakable connection with the mortal human body, and argument that people believe in the gods for purely psychological reasons, such as fear.

Three Arguments Against the Immortality of the Soul (*Nature*, 3b)
Come now, that you may be able to learn that the minds and the light souls of living things have birth and death, I will hurry to present verses long sought out and found with willing effort, worthy to guide your life. It is your choice to link both of these in a single name, and when, to choose a case, I continue to speak of the soul, proving that it is mortal, suppose that I speak of mind as well, inasmuch as they are at one each with the other and compose a single thing.

First of all, I have shown that the soul is finely made of tiny bodies and of first-beginnings [i.e., atoms] far smaller than the liquid moisture of water, clouds or smoke. For, it far surpasses them in speed of motion, and is more prone to move when struck by some slight cause. For indeed the soul is moved by images of smoke and cloud. Even when dreaming in sleep, we see altars breathing steam on high, and sending up their smoke. Undoubtedly, these are image particles (eidola) that are carried to us. Now, when containers are shattered, you see the water flowing away on every side, and the liquid parting this way and that, and since cloud and smoke disperse into air. Thus, you must believe that the soul too is scattered and passes away far more swiftly, and is dissolved more quickly into its first-bodies, after it has withdrawn from a man's limbs, and has departed. For indeed, the body, which was the container of the soul, so to speak, cannot hold it together, when by some chance it is shattered and made thinner, since the blood is withdrawn from the veins. How, then, could you believe that the soul could be held together by any air, which is thinner than our body and can contain it less?

Further [and secondly], we feel that the understanding is created along with the body, and grows together with it, and along with it comes to old age. For as children totter with feeble and tender body, so a weak judgement of mind goes with it. Then when their years are ripe and their strength hardened, greater is their sense and increased their force of mind. Afterward, when now the body is shattered by the stern strength of time, and the frame has sunk with its force dulled, then the reason is maimed, the tongue raves, the mind stumbles, everything give way and fail at once. We see, then, that the mind is born with the body, grows with it, and, as I have shown, at the same time becomes weary and worn with age. Thus, it is natural that the entire nature of the mind should also be dissolved, just as smoke is dispersed into the high breezes of the air. . . . .

[Thirdly,] since we perceive that the mind is cured, just like the sick body, and we see that it can be changed by medicine, this too forewarns us that the mind has a mortal life. For whoever attempts to alter the mind, or seeks to change any other nature, must indeed add parts to it or transfer them from their order, or take away some small piece at least from the whole. But what is immortal does not permit its parts to be transposed, nor that any part should be added or depart from it. For whenever a thing changes and passes out of its own limits, immediately this is the death of that which was before. So whether the mind is sick, it gives signs of its mortality, as I have proved, or whether it is changed by medicine. So surely is true fact seen to run counter to false reasoning, and to shut off retreat from him who flees, and with double-edged refutation to prove the falsehood.

Naturalist Explanations for Why People Believe in the Gods (*Nature*, 5.e)
What cause has spread the notion of the existence and power of the gods across the wide nations of the earth? This notion has filled cities with altars and led solemn sacred rites to be instituted (which rites now flourish and are performed on all important occasions and in all distinguished places). This terror pervades mortals, a terror which raises new temples of the deities throughout the whole globe of the earth, and drives men to celebrate their worship on feast days. It is not so difficult, as it may seem, to explain.

In those early times of which we speak, the tribes of mortals saw in their minds, even when awake, glorious images as of gods, and saw them even more distinctly in their sleep, and of an extraordinary size. To these, therefore, they attributed life, because they seemed to move their limbs, and to utter majestic words, suitable to their distinguished appearance and mighty strength. They also assigned to them an immortal existence, because their appearances came in

constant succession, and their form remained the same. But they might certainly have believed them immortal for another reason. They might have considered that beliefs, possessing such apparent strength, could not easily be overpowered by any destructive force. They thought of the gods as perfectly happy, because the fear of death could not trouble any of them. Also, in their dreams they saw them do many and extraordinary actions, and it seemed that they experienced no difficulty when performing them.

Further, they observed the revolutions of the heavens, and the various seasons of the year, go around in a certain order. Yet they could not understand by what causes these effects were produced. Thus, they would seek a refuge by handing over all things to the gods and supposing all things to be guided by their will.

They placed the homes and realms of the gods in the sky, because night and moon are seen to roll through heaven. That is, moon, day, night, the grand constellations of night, the nightly luminaries of the heavens, the flying meteors, the clouds, the sun, the rain, the snow, the winds, lightning, hail, and the violent noise and loud threatening murmurs of the thunder.

But observe how the race of men are unhappy when, in addition to attributing such acts to the gods, they also ascribe bitter wrath to them. What sorrow did they then create for themselves, and what sufferings for us! What fears have they passed down to later generations!

Further, there is nothing pious for a man to be seen with his head veiled, turning towards a stone, and drawing near to every altar; or to fall face down on the ground, and to stretch out his hands before the shrines of the gods; or to sprinkle the altars with the profuse blood of four-footed animals, and to add vows upon vows. Rather, it is piety to be able to look at all things with a mind at peace.

We may look up to the celestial regions of the vast world above, and contemplate the night sky studded with glittering stars, and reflect upon the revolutions of the sun and moon. When we do this, an anxiety might awaken within our hearts about the possibility that an almighty power of the gods is above us, which guides the stars in their various motions (an anxiety that might have otherwise remained buried under the weight of other worries).

Lack of reasoning, and ignorance of natural causes, upsets our minds with doubts about whether there was any birth or beginning to the world, or whether there is any limit of time until which the walls of the world, and the silent movements of the heavenly bodies, can endure its continuous activity; or whether the heavens, divinely endowed with an imperishable nature, can, as they roll along time's eternal course, defy the mighty power of endless age.

Besides, whose heart does not shrink at the terrors of the gods? Whose limbs do not shudder with dread, when the scorched earth shakes with the terrible flash of lightning, and when the roars of thunder fill the vast sky? Do not people and nations tremble? Do not proud rulers, filled with fear of the deities, quiver in every nerve, in the event that the dreaded time may come to pay the penalty for some foul action, or arrogant word?

Consider likewise when the mighty force of a furious wind, raging over the sea, sweeps the commander of a fleet over the waters, along with his powerful legions and elephants. Does he not seek with vows the peace of the gods, and fearfully implore them with prayers for a lull in the winds and a favorable breeze? Unfortunately, he implores them to no purpose. Frequently, seized by a violent hurricane, he is nevertheless swept away to the shoals of death. Thus some unseen power, apparently, bears upon human things, and seems to trample down proud symbols of authority, and make them merely a sport for itself.

Further, when the whole earth totters under our feet, and cities, shaken to their foundation, fall or threaten to fall, what wonder is it, that the nations of the world despise and humble themselves, and admit the vast influence of the gods over the world, and their stupendous power to govern all things?

STUDY QUESTIONS

Please answer all of the following questions.

1. Give an example of Diogenes' odd behavior that shows his contempt for luxury.
2. Explain Epicurus' view of the slight swerve and how it applies to free will.
3. According to Epicurus, how do we get rid of our fear of the gods?
4. For Epicurus, what are the three kinds of natural desires, and which kind best brings about happiness?
5. According to Zeno the Stoic, what are the four degrees of conviction?
6. Explain the Stoic view of the eternal recurrence.
7. Explain the Stoic metaphor of rolling a barrel down a hill and how this applies to the issue of free will.
8. According to Epictetus the Stoic, which types of things are within our control?
9. According to Sextus Empiricus the Skeptic, how does skepticism lead to tranquility?

10. Explain the first mode of skepticism.
11. What is the skeptic's response to those who say that the skeptical position "doubt everything" is self-refuting?
12. What is the skeptic's response to those who say that skeptics refute themselves in their very lives as they engage in the world?
13. For Plotinus, what are the three parts of the divine triad, and what does each of them create?
14. For Plotinus, what can we say about the nature of the One?
15. According to Plotinus, how do we gain the proper eyesight to see the beauty of the One?
[Reading 1: Lucian's "Philosophers for Sale"
16. What are the main features of the philosophy of Diogenes the Cynic as depicted in Lucian's "Philosophers for Sale"?
17. What are the main features of the philosophy of Chrysippus the Stoic as depicted in Lucian's "Philosophers for Sale"?
18. What are the main features of the philosophy of Pyrrho the Skeptic as depicted in Lucian's "Philosophers for Sale"?
[Reading 2: Lucretius on Religious Beliefs]
19. What are Lucretius's three arguments against the immortality of the soul?
20. According to Lucretius, what are some of the naturalistic and psychological explanations for why people believe in the gods?
[Short Essay]
21. Short essay: pick any one of the following views in this chapter and criticize it in a minimum of 150 words. Pick any one of the following views by Cynics, Epicureans, Stoics, Skeptics or Neoplatonists and criticize it in a minimum of 150 words. Cynics: defying social convention. Epicureans: atoms in a vacuum; free will and the slight swerve; death is nothing to us; not fearing the gods; pleasure through moderation. Stoics: the law of bivalence; the eternal recurrence; resigning oneself to fate. Skeptics: tranquility through suspension of judgment; balancing competing arguments; moral relativism. Neoplatonists: the One as undifferentiated unity; reality as emanations from the One; evil as the absence of good; the human soul returning to the divine nature.