

Greek History and Thought

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Homer and the Greek Renaissance, 900-600BC

Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles, murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses, hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls, great fighters' souls, but made their bodies carrion, feasts for the dogs and birds, and the will of Zeus was moving toward its end. Begin, Muse, when the first two broke and clashed, Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles.

What god drove them to fight with such fury? Apollo the son of Zeus and Leto. Incensed at the king he swept a fatal plague through the army – men were dying and all because Agamemnon spurned Apollo's priest. Yes, Chryses approached the Achaeans' fast ships to win his daughter back, bringing a priceless ransom and bearing high in hand, wound on a golden staff, the wreaths of the god, the distant deadly Archer. He begged the whole Achaean army but most of all the two supreme commanders, Atreus' two sons, "Agamemnon, Menelaus – all Argives geared for war! May the gods who hold the halls of Olympus give you Priam's city to plunder, then safe passage home. Just set my daughter free, my dear one . . . here, accept these gifts, this ransom. Honor the god who strikes from worlds away – the son of Zeus, Apollo!"

*And all ranks of Achaeans cried out their assent: "Respect the priest, accept the shining ransom!" But it brought no joy to the heart of Agamemnon. The king dismissed the priest with a brutal order ringing in his ears: "Never again, old man, let me catch sight of you by the hollow ships! Not loitering now, not slinking back tomorrow. The staff and the wreaths of god will never save you then. The girl – I won't give up the girl. Long before that, old age will overtake her in my house, in Argos, far from her fatherland, slaving back and forth at the loom, forced to share my bed!"

*Now go, don't tempt my wrath – and you may

depart alive.“*

Throughout the past 2500 years of western history there has been a tendency on the part of one age after another to go back in time to find something of itself in the past. The quest for collective identity has often taken scholars, artists, intellectuals, philosophers, scientists and others back to that historical point in time in which it all began. For us moderns of the past 500 years, that tendency is strong and it is no accident that we have often found our identity in the world of Classical Greece. There is something about the word “classical” that is indeed appealing. We speak about classical music, a classic film or even classic Coke. By calling something classic we mean that it stands the test of time, or that it is number one, or that in all times and all places it is somehow good.

The ancient Greeks seemed to have placed western society as well as the western intellectual tradition on a footing or groundwork that remains to this day. We take this foundation for granted, for the simple reason that the Greeks of the classical age seemed to have discovered so many things which today matter a great deal. So, although our voyage into the ancient past has begun with the Ancient Near East we now find ourselves on the Attic peninsula, in the heart of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Greek history itself can be broken down into many distinct eras – historians break down the past for the simple reason that these eras provide focal points for study and dialogue. In general, Greek history can be broken down in the following way:

Archaic Greece 3000-1600 B.C.

Mycenaen Greece 1600-1200 B.C.

Dark Ages 1200-800 B.C.

Greek Renaissance 800-600 B.C.

Classical or Hellenic Greece 600-323 B.C.

Hellenistic Greece 323-31 B.C.

This section deals with a rather broad expanse of historical time, beginning with Archaic Greece and ending with the creation of Athenian direct democracy during the Greek Renaissance.

Before we begin, we have to ask ourselves a few fundamental questions. If we are about to discuss the Greek Renaissance, then we must first ask ourselves what is meant by the expression “Renaissance.” As we all know, the word “renaissance” simply means rebirth – a new birth, something perhaps entirely new, a watershed, a turning point, a point at which things changed. For the historian looking at the western intellectual tradition it means primarily a revival of the arts and letters and is usually associated with that period of European history between 1300 and 1500 when scholars and artists in northern Italian city states, Holland, France and England witnessed the rebirth of a golden age.

The golden age was, of course, classical Greece. But the term “renaissance,” which Renaissance humanists created to describe their own period of light, is a value-charged expression. What this means is that calling something a renaissance implies a value judgment. On the one hand it implies that something before the Renaissance must have died. And Renaissance scholars gave that something a name – they called it the *media aetis* – a middle age. Middle of what? Well obviously, middle between the Renaissance and the classical world. The Middle Ages have always gotten a bad rap – why do you think they are usually referred to as the Dark Ages? Simple. Renaissance artists were so conceited that they called their own age “like a golden age” – anything that came immediately before it must have been somehow bad or dark.

Of course, there has been more than one Renaissance in the past. For instance, we have the Greek Renaissance. And then there’s the Carolingian Renaissance of the 8th and 9th centuries and the 12th century Renaissance.

The first important society in the Greek world developed on the large island of Crete, just south of the Aegean Sea. The people of Crete were not Greek but probably came from western Asia Minor well before 3000 B.C. In 1900, the English archeologist, Arthur Evans (1851-1941), excavated Knossos, the greatest city of ancient Crete. There he discovered the remains of a magnificent palace which he named the Palace of Minos, the mythical king of Crete (and so, Cretan civilization is also known as Minoan). The palace bureaucrats of Crete wrote in a script called Linear A and

although their language has not been fully deciphered, it is assumed that they may have been a member of the Indo-European family of languages, which includes Greek and Latin.

With an estimated population of 250,000 people (40,000 in Knossos alone), the Minoans traded with the people of the Fertile Crescent. Their palaces became the centers of economic activity and political power. The palaces themselves were constructed with rooms of varying sizes and functions and it seemed as if there were no apparent design (the Greeks later called them labyrinths). Although the Minoans were remarkable for their trade networks, architecture and the arts, their civilization eventually declined. Although historians have not agreed on an exact cause, it has been suggested that a large earthquake on the island of Thera may have created a tidal wave that engulfed the island of Crete. Whatever the cause of their decline, Minoan society was transformed by invaders from the Greek mainland.

How the Greeks settled on the Greek mainland is significant for their future development. Greece is a mountainous country and full of valleys. Greece is also nearly surrounded by water. Hopefully the geographical differences between Greek civilization and that of Sumer or Egypt are apparent to you. Because of their geography, the Greeks were encouraged to settle the land in independent political communities. These communities would soon come to be known as city-states. Each city state or polis had its own political organization and thus was truly independent. The largest and most powerful of all the city-states in the period 1600-1100 was that of Mycenae and this period of time has come to be called the Mycenaean Age.

By the 16th century, MYCENAE was an extremely wealthy, prosperous and powerful state. Archeological discoveries of the area have uncovered swords, weapons and the remains of well-fortified city walls showing that this city-state was indeed a community of warriors. Each city-state in the Mycenaean period was independent and under the rule of its own king. The only time the city-states may have united was during the war with Troy in Asia Minor.

By 1300, the Greek mainland was under attack by ships from Asia Minor and by 1100, Mycenae was completely destroyed. This invasion is known as the Dorian Invasion – the Doric Greeks were supposedly tribes who had left Greece at an earlier time and then returned by 1200 B.C. Following the Dorian Invasion Greece fell into its own period of

the Dark Ages. For the most part, Greek culture began to go into decline – pottery became less elegant, burials were less ornate and the building of large structures and public buildings came to an abrupt halt. However, the invasion and subsequent Dark Age did not mark the end of Greek civilization. Some technological skills survived and the Greek language was preserved by those people who settled in areas unaffected by the Dorian Invasion.

After 800 B.C. a new spirit of optimism and adventure began to appear in Greece. This spirit became so intensified that historians have called the period from 800-600 the Greek Renaissance. For instance, in literature, this is the age of the great epic poets, poets who wrote of the deeds of mortal men as well as of immortal gods. It is also the period of the first Olympic games, held in 776 B.C.

The best though sometimes unreliable source of Greek civilization in this period is HOMER, and in particular, two epic poems usually attributed to him. We don't really know much about Homer. His place of birth is doubtful although Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamis, Chios, Argos and Athens have all contended for the honor of having been his birthplace. His date of birth has been assumed to be as far back as 1200 B.C. but, based on the style of his two epic poems, 850-800 B.C. seems more likely. It has been said that Homer was blind, but even that is a matter of conjecture. And lastly, we are not even sure that Homer wrote those two classics of the western literary canon, the Iliad and the Odyssey.

The confusion arises from the fact that the world of Homer was a world of oral tradition and oral history. There is evidence to show that Homer's epics were really ballads and were chanted and altered for centuries until they were finally digested into the form we know today 540 B.C. by Pisistratus, a man we shall meet again but in a very different context. We shall assume, as generations before us have done, that Homer was the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey.

In twenty-four books of dactylic hexameter verse, the Iliad narrates the events of the last year of the Trojan War, and focuses on the withdrawal of Achilles from the contest and the disastrous effects of this act on the Greek campaign. The Trojan War was fought between Greek invaders and the defenders of Troy, probably near the beginning of the 12th century B.C. Archeological evidence gathered in our own century shows that the war did indeed take place and was based on the struggle for

control of important trade routes across the Hellespont, which were dominated by the city of Troy (see map). About this war there grew a body of myth that was recounted by Homer in the Iliad, the Odyssey and a number of now-lost epics.

According to the more familiar versions of this complex myth, the cause of the war was the episode of the golden apple which resulted in the abduction by the Trojan prince Paris of Helen, the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Earlier, most of the rulers of Greece had been suitors for the Hand of Helen and her father, Tyndareus, had made them swear to support the one chosen. So, they joined Menelaus and prepared to move against Troy under the leadership of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae.

After forcing Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to insure fair weather, they set sail for Troy. In the tenth and final year of the war with Troy, Achilles withdrew from the fight in an argument with Agamemnon over possession of a female captive, however, grieved by the death of his friend Patroclus, he rejoined the battle and killed the Trojan leader, Hector.

That, in brief, is the action of the Iliad. The characters we encounter are warriors through and through – not just warriors, but aristocratic warriors who considered greatness in battle to be the highest virtue a man could attain. This HEROIC OUTLOOK was composed of courage, bravery and glory in battle and was necessary for a strong city-state in Greek civilization. But these were not self-interested goals alone. Instead, the warrior fought bravely in service to his city-state. We are not talking about patriotism here. Virtue was what made man a good citizen, and good citizens made a great city-state. We shall encounter virtue a great deal in conjunction with the Athenian city-state.

The world of Homer is a world of war, conflict, life and death. In fact, when I think of all the descriptions of war that I have managed to read over the years, none have drawn so clear a picture or image as has Homer. From Book 4 of the Iliad we experience the following:

At last the armies clashed at one strategic point, they slammed their shields together, pike scraped pike with the grappling strength of fighters armed in bronze and their round shields pounded, boss on welded boss, and the sound of struggle roared and rocked the earth. Screams of men and cries of triumph breaking in one breath, fighters killing, fighters killed, and the ground streamed blood. Wildly as two winter torrents raging down from the moun-

tains, swirling into a valley, hurl their great waters together, flash floods from the wellsprings plunging down in a gorge and miles away in the hills a shepherd hears the thunder – so from the grinding armies broke the cries and crash of war.

Antilochus was the first to kill a Trojan captain, tough on the front lines, Thalysias' son Echeplus. Antilochus thrust first, speared the horsehair helmet right at the ridge, and the bronze spearpoint lodged in the man's forehead, smashing through his skull and the dark came whirling down across his eyes – he toppled down like a tower in the rough assault. As he fell the enormous Elephenor grabbed his feet, Chalcodon's son, lord of the brave-hearted Abantes, dragged him out from under the spears, rushing madly to strip his gear but his rush was short-lived. Just as he dragged that corpse the brave Agenor spied his ribs, bared by his shield as he bent low – Agenor stabbed with a bronze spear and loosed his limbs, his life spirit left him and over his dead body now the savage work went on, Achaeans and Trojans mauling each other there like wolves, leaping, hurtling into each other, man throttling man.

In the Homeric world of war, men do not have rights, but only duties. By serving the city-state with their virtuous behavior, they are also serving themselves. Indeed, there was nothing higher or more sublime in the Homeric world than virtue. And Homer's epic poems served as the Bible of ancient Greece right down to the time of Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C. In fact, an education in the classical world meant the rote memorization of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey.

Homer's world is a closed and finite world. This is completely unlike our own world which is a mechanical world, governed by mathematics and fixed physical laws. Homer's world is a living world – the earth, man, animals and plants are all endowed with personality, emotion and wills of their own. Even the gods and goddesses were endowed with these qualities. The gods themselves could appear at any time and at any place. Although the gods had no permanent relations with the world of men and women, they were interested in their welfare. They also intervened in the affairs of life, as Homer's Iliad makes abundantly clear. In general, the gods were the guides and councilors of mortal men and women. Still, the gods and goddesses often deceived men by offering them delusion rather than reality.

For Homer, the world was not governed by caprice,

whim or chance – what governed the world was "Moira" (fate, fortune, destiny). Fate was a system of regulations that control the unfolding of all life, all men and women, all things of the natural world, and all gods and goddesses. Fate was not only a system of regulations but a fundamental law that maintained the world. It is Moira that gives men and women their place and function in Greek society. That is, it is Moira that determines who shall be slave or master, peasant or warrior, citizen or non-citizen, Greek or barbarian. It is Moira that fixed the rhythm of human life – from childhood through youth to old age and finally death, it was Fate that regulated the personal growth of the individual. Even the gods had their destinies determined by Moira. From the Iliad, the goddess Athena expounds on this principle of Fate to Telemachus when she says the gods may help mortals but "Death is the law for all: the gods themselves/ Cannot avert it from the man they cherish when baneful Moira has pronounced his doom."

Given all this, it should be obvious that Greek religion was polytheistic. Homer endowed his gods with a personality and the gods differed from men only (1) in their physical perfection and (2) in their immortality. In other words, gods and goddesses, like men and women, could be good, bad honest, devious, jealous, vengeful, calm, sober, quick-witted or dim. The gods assisted their favorite mortals and punished those who defied their will. Most gods were common to all Greeks but each city-state also had their own patron deity. Gods and goddesses were worshipped in public. But there were also household gods – the gods of the hearth – specific to each family or clan. The general acceptance of these gods is a sign of a specific culture that arose during the Greek Renaissance, a culture we can identify as "Panhellenic."

The Athenian Origins of Direct Democracy

One of the hallmarks of GREEK CIVILIZATION was the polis, or city-state. The city-states were small, independent communities which were male-dominated and bound together by race. What this means is that membership in the polis was hereditary and could not be passed on to someone outside the citizen family. The citizens of any given polis were an elite group of people – slaves, peasants, women and resident aliens were not part of the body of citizens.

Originally the polis referred to a defensible area to which farmers of a particular area could retreat in the event of an attack. The Acropolis in Athens is

one such example. Over time, towns grew around these defensible areas. The growth of these towns was unplanned and unlike the city-states we encounter at Sumer, they were not placed for commercial convenience near rivers or seas. In fact, the poleis were situated well inland to avoid raids by sea. With time, the agora or marketplace began to appear within the polis. The agora was not only a marketplace but the heart of Greek intellectual life and discourse.

The scale of the polis was indeed small. When the philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) came to discuss the origins of the polis in his book *POLITICS* in the early 4th century B.C. he suggested that “it is necessary for the citizens to be of such a number that they knew each other’s personal qualities and thus can elect their officials and judge their fellows in a court of law sensibly.” Before Aristotle, Plato fixed the number of citizens in an ideal state at 5040 adult males. For Plato (c.427-c.347 B.C.), as it was for Aristotle, the one true criteria of the size of the polis was that all the citizens know one another. The issue at stake here is between public and private worlds. The ancient Greeks did not really see two distinct worlds in the lives of the citizenry. Instead, the public world was to be joined with the private world.

The citizens in any given polis were related to one another by blood and so family ties were very strong. As boys, they grew up together in schools, and as men, they served side by side during times of war. They debated one another in public assemblies – they elected one another as magistrates – they cast their votes as jurors for or against their fellow citizens. In such a society – the society of the polis – all citizens were intimately and directly involved in politics, justice, military service, religious ceremonies, intellectual discussion, athletics and artistic pursuits. To shirk one’s responsibilities was not only rare but reprehensible in the eyes of the Greek citizen. Greek citizens did not have rights, but duties. A citizen who did not fulfill his duties was socially disruptive. At the polis of Sparta, such a citizen was called “an Inferior.” At Athens, a citizen who held no official position or who was not a habitual orator in the Assembly was branded as idiotai.

Every polis was different from another. For example, some poleis had different names for the months of the year. Although there were similarities and differences between the city-states, they all made the effort to preserve their own unique identity. What we call the ancient Greek world was really

hundreds of independent city-states or poleis. No one polis was a replica of another. Those who lived within the confines of a city state considered everyone else to be inferior. Furthermore, those people who did not speak Greek were referred to as barbar, the root of our word barbarian.

Sparta

There were two city-states that were indicative of Greek city-states as a whole: Sparta and Athens. At Sparta, located on the Peloponnesus (see map), five Dorian villages combined to form the Spartan state. In the 8th century, this state conquered all the other peoples of Laconia, one of the most fertile plains in Greece. Although the Spartans extended their territory, they did not extend their citizenship. The new subjects (*perioikoi*) were residents of Lacedaemonia, but citizens remained limited to those native born at Sparta.

From Lycurgus (no one knows who this man was or why his name carried so much significance for the Spartans), we learn that boys left home at the age of seven. They were organized into troops and played competitive games until their 18th year, when they underwent four years of military training. From the ages of 18 to 28 they lived together in barracks. At the age of 30, they became citizens in their own right. Amongst themselves they were called “Equals” – in the eyes of everyone else, they were Spartans. There was state education for girls who lived at home but who were also organized into troops. Boys and girls met together to learn basic studies as well as to dance, sing and play musical instruments. Relations between the sexes was much more free than anywhere else in the Greek world. However, after marriage (usually at 30 for men, 16 for women), the husband ate at the men’s club until the age of 60 while his wife remained at home.

The Spartan state arranged for a basic equality in land holding and provided the citizens with laborers, called helots (conquered people such as the Messenians who became Spartan serfs). In other words, the economy was based on the idea that slaves would labor to supply the Spartan armies with food, drink and clothing. As a result, the slave population of Sparta was enormous, thus necessitating the sort of militaristic state that Sparta indeed became. The Spartan constitution allowed for two kings and was therefore a dual monarchy. As the highest magistrates in the city-state, these kings decided issues of war and peace.

The Spartan constitution was mixed, containing

elements of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy. The oligarchic element was represented by a Council (gerousia) of elders consisting of twenty-eight men over the age of sixty who were held office for life. The elders had important judicial functions and were also consulted before any proposal was put before the Assembly of Spartan citizens. The Assembly (apella) consisted of all male citizens over thirty years of age. In theory, it was the Assembly who was the final authority but in practice the real function of the Assembly was to ratify decisions already decided upon by the elders and kings

For the Greeks, citizenship – that is, the active participation of all citizens in politics – was considered to be the supreme creative art. In essence, the city-state was synonymous with its citizenry. Like a sculptor, the citizen molded a fully rounded society to his preconceived notion of what that society ought to be.

The system developed by the Spartan state by the late 6th century B.C. was deliberate and purposeful. It was created not just to keep the ever-growing population of helots in check but rather to realize man's full ideal within the society of the polis. The Spartan ideal was austere, severe and limited according to our standards. But when political thinkers such as Plato decided to create their own ideal society on paper, they turned to Sparta for examples and not to Athens. I imagine the real reason for this is that the Spartans created a world in both theory and practice, while the Athenians almost always seemed lost in what might come to be. Although we may find the Spartan world to be repressive or indeed oppressive, this is not the way the Spartans saw it. After all, they had equality in education, training and opportunity. They also enjoyed a large income as well as pride and glory.

Athens

While Sparta developed their control over the Peloponnese, the city-state of Athens controlled the area of the Attic Peninsula, to the east and north-east of Sparta (see map). Athens was similar to other city-states of the period of the Greek Renaissance with two important differences: (1) it was larger both geographically and in terms of its population and (2) those people it conquered were not reduced to servitude – this was the rule at Sparta. So, Athens never faced the problem of trying to control a large population of angry and sometimes violent subjects. This also explains why Sparta had to remain an intensely militaristic state.

Around the year 600 B.C., and while Lycurgus was

reforming the legal system of the Spartan state, Athens faced a deepening political crisis. Those farmers who supplied the city-state with food could not keep up with demand because the Athenian population had grown too quickly. Farmers began to trade their land to obtain food and quickly went bankrupt as they traded away their last piece of land. The crisis was solved in 594 B.C. when the Athenians gave control over to Solon (c.640-c.559 B.C.), a former high official. In his role as archon, Solon cancelled all agricultural debts and announced that all slaves were free. He also passed constitutional reforms that divided Athenian subjects into four classes based on their annual agricultural production rather than birth. Members of the three highest orders could hold public office.

Solon's system excluded all those people who did not own any productive land – women, children, slaves, resident aliens, artisans and merchants. However, with the constitutional reforms of Solon, men from newer and less-established families could work their way up economically and achieve positions of political leadership. Solon did not end the agricultural crisis in Greece and so factional strife remained.

In 561, the former military leader Pisistratus (c.600-527 B.C.) appeared at Athens and seized the Acropolis and began to rule as a tyrant in place of Solon. Down to 527, the year of his death, he rewarded dispossessed peasants with land confiscated from wealthier families. He also encouraged trade and industry and engaged in great public works programs. Temples were built and religious centers improved. New religious festivals were also introduced by Pisistratus, such as the one devoted to the god Dionysis, the god of fertility.

By the middle of the 6th century, the city had grown in size and in wealth. Furthermore, the common people had become more sure of themselves – they had a high standard of living, more leisure time at their disposal and were far-better informed than their ancestors had been. Since a tyrant like Pisistratus wanted to give his power over to a more popular base of support, it was during his reign that the average citizen obtained his political experience. Furthermore, because men continued to qualify for office on the basis of wealth, and since incomes were rising in the 6th century, there was a greater number of citizens being included in the operation of the government.

Pisistratus was succeeded by his eldest son, Hippias, whose rule was somewhat similar to that of

his father. In 514 B.C., his brother Hipparchus was murdered and Hippias became nervous and suspicious. Finally, one of the noble clans exiled by the sons of Pisistratus, the Alemaeonids, won favor with the oracle at Delphi and used its support to persuade Sparta to attack the Athenian tyranny. Led by Cleomenes I, the Spartans marched into Athenian territory in 510 B.C. Hippias was deposed and fled to Persia.

Cleomenes' friend Isagoras held the leading position in Athens after the withdrawal of the Spartan troops, but he was not unopposed. Cleisthenes, of the restored Alemaeonid clan was his chief rival. Isagoras tried to restore a version of the pre-Solonian aristocratic state by purifying the citizen lists

Cleisthenes took an unprecedented action by turning to the people for political support and won with it a program of great popular appeal. In 508 B.C., Cleisthenes instituted a new political organization whereby the citizens would take a more forceful and more direct role in running the city-state. He called this new political organization *demokratia*, or democracy – rule by the entire body of citizens. He created a Council of Five Hundred which planned the business of the public assemblies. All male citizens over the age of thirty could serve for a term of one year on the Council and no one could serve more than two terms in a lifetime. Such an organization was necessary, thought Cleisthenes, so that every citizen would learn from direct political experience. With such a personal interest in his democracy, Cleisthenes believed that there would be no citizens to conspire and attempt to abolish the system.

Cleisthenes also divided all Athenians into ten tribes (replacing the original four). The composition of each tribe guaranteed that no region would dominate any of them. Because the tribes had common religious activities and fought as regimental units, the new organization would also increase devotion to the polis and diminish regional division.

Each tribe would send fifty men to serve on the Council of Five Hundred (thus replacing Solon's Council of 400). Each set of fifty men would serve as a presiding committee for a period of thirty-five days. The Council convened the Assembly – an Assembly which, as of the year 450 B.C. – consisted of approximately 21,000 citizens. Of this number, perhaps 12-15000 were absent as they were serving in the army, navy or were simply away from Athens on business or otherwise. The Council scrutinized the qualifications of officials and the allocation of

funds. They looked after the construction of docks and surveyed public buildings. They collected rent on public land and oversaw the redistribution of confiscated property. Members of the Council were also responsible for examining the horses of the cavalry, administering state pensions and receiving foreign delegations. In other words, the Council was responsible for the smooth running of the daily operations of the Athenian city-state.

Membership on the Council was for one year but it was possible to serve a second term. A minimum of 250 new members had to be chosen every year and it has been suggested that 35-45% of all Athenian citizens had experience on the Council. Serving on the Council of Five Hundred was a full time job and those who did serve were paid a fee.

Every year 500 Council members and 550 Guards were chosen by lot from the villages of the Athenian polis. These men were scrutinized by the Council before they were chosen so that alternates were always available. The rapid turnover in the Council ensured (1) that a large number of Athenians held some political position in their lifetime and that (2) the Assembly would contain a larger and more sophisticated membership. The Assembly contained all those citizens who were not serving on the Council of 500 or who were not serving as public officials. The Assembly had forty regular meetings per year – there were four meetings in each 35 day period into which the Council's year was divided. The first meeting discussed the corn supply, the qualifications of officials, questions of defense and ostracisms. The second meeting was open to any issue, while the third and fourth meetings were given over to debates on religion and foreign and secular affairs. Special meetings or emergency sessions could be called at any time.

Around 460 B.C., Pericles (c.490-429 B.C.) used the power of the people in the law courts and the Assembly to break up the Council of Five Hundred. Under Pericles, ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY came to mean the equality of justice and the equality of opportunity. The equality of justice was secured by the jury system, which ensured that slaves and resident aliens were represented through their patrons. The equality of opportunity did not mean that every man has the right to everything. What it did mean is that the criteria for choosing citizens for office was merit and efficiency and not wealth. Whereas Solon had used the criterion of birth for his officials and Cleisthenes had used wealth, Pericles now used merit. This was the ideal for Pericles. What indeed happened in practice was quite differ-

ent. The Greek historian Thucydides (c.460-c.400 B.C.) commented on the reality of democracy under Pericles when he wrote: "It was in theory, a democracy but in fact it became the rule of the first Athenian." And the historian Herodotus (c.485-425 B.C.) added that "nothing could be found better than the one man, the best." This "one man, the best," was the *aristoi*, the word from which we get the expression aristocracy. So, what began as Greek democracy under Cleisthenes around 500 B.C., became an aristocracy under Pericles by 430 B.C.

The Council of Five Hundred and the Assembly met often and what they discussed focused on decidedly local issues. But they also discussed what we could only call democratic theory – that is, they constantly debated questions like what is the good life? and what is the best form of government? But perhaps the most important of all were discussions and debates over the issues of war. And this is important to grasp for the 5th century, the classical age of Greece, is an age of near constant warfare. Between 490 and 474 B.C., the Greeks fought the Persians and at the end of the century (431-404 B.C.), a war between Sparta and Athens not only spelled the end of Athenian dominance, but also the death of Athenian direct democracy.

Classical Greece, 500-323 BC

When we think of ancient Greece and the ancient Greeks, it is usually the 5th century which commands our undivided attention. This is the age of the great historians Herodotus and Thucydides, great dramatists like Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus, and the brilliant philosopher Socrates. The 5th century is also regarded as the age when the Greeks embraced their brilliant experiment in direct democracy. Amazing monuments to human achievement were constructed in Athens and other Hellenic city-states. It is an age of human discovery and achievement – an age which proudly bears the name classical.

The Persian Invasion of Greece

However, the 5th century was also an age of war and conflict. Between 490 and 479 B.C., Greece was invaded by the army and naval fleet of the Persian Empire. By about 500 B.C. the Greek city states had lost their kings (with the exception of Sparta) and had embraced a new form of government through councils of citizens. Almost immediately, however, these states were confronted by an invasion of the Persian Empire.

King Darius (548-486 B.C.) managed to build up the Persian Empire and now controlled Asia Minor, including Greek poleis on the west coast. In 499 B.C., some of these poleis rebelled from the Persians (an episode called the Ionian Revolt). The Athenians lent their support but the revolt ultimately collapsed in 493 B.C. Darius proposed now to invade mainland Greece – his prime target was Athens. Darius sent his fleet across the Aegean in 490 and awaited news of victory.

The Persians landed at Marathon, a village just north of Athens. Commanded by Miltiades, the Greek forces totaled only 10,000 men – the Persian force was perhaps 20-25,000 strong. The Greek forces charged and trapped the Persians and won the battle. The remainder of the Persians attempted to attack Athens but the Greek army rushed back and the Persians were forced to return to Asia Minor. The victory at MARATHON was won by superior timing and discipline.

Darius prepared a second invasion but died (486 B.C.) before his plans could be carried out. The task was taken up by Xerxes (c.519-465 B.C.) who prepared a huge force that would attack by land and sea. In 483 B.C., the Athenian statesman Themistocles (c.523-c.458 B.C.) persuaded his fellow Athenians to build a navy of one hundred triremes. He also oversaw the fortification of the harbor at Piraeus. Fearing destruction at the hands of the Persians, in 480 B.C. thirty poleis formed an alliance. Athens, Sparta and Corinth were the most powerful members.

In 480 B.C., Xerxes sent a force of 60,000 men and 600 ships to Greece. The Greeks made their stand at Thermopylae. Five thousand men took up their positions to defend the pass at Thermopylae. The Greeks held the pass but eventually a traitorous Greek led a Persian force through the hills to the rear of the Greek forces, who were subsequently massacred. Meanwhile, the Greek navy tried to hold off the Persian ships at Artemisium. The Athenians eventually abandoned Athens ahead of the Persian army. The Persians marched across the Attic peninsula and burned Athens. Themistocles then sent a false message to Xerxes, telling him to strike at once. The Persians were taken in and sent their navy into the narrow strait between Athens and the island of Salamis. More than three hundred Greek ships rammed the Persians and heavily armed Greek soldiers boarded the ships. The Greek victory at Salamis was a decisive one. However, Persian forces remained in Greece. Their final expulsion came in 479 B.C. at the village of Plataea.

By 479 B.C., the Greek forces had all conquered the Persian army and navy. After the Persian Wars, Athens emerged as the most dominant political and economic force in the Greek world. The Athenian polis, buttressed by the strength of its Council of Five Hundred and Assembly of citizens, managed to gain control of a confederation of city-states which gradually became the Athenian Empire.

The Athenians not only had a political leadership based on the principles of direct democracy as set in motion by Cleisthenes (see Lecture 6), they also had wide trading and commercial interests in the Mediterranean world. These trading interests spread throughout the area of the Aegean Sea including Asia Minor, an area known as the Aegean Basin. Greek victories against the Persians secured mainland Greece from further invasion. There was a great sense of relief on the part of all Greeks that they had now conquered the conquerors. But, there were some citizens who argued in the Assembly that a true Greek victory would only follow from total defeat of the Persians, and this meant taking the war to Persia itself. And this is precisely what would happen in the 5th century.

Meanwhile, dozens of Greek city-states joined together to form a permanent union for the war. Delegates met on the island of Delos in 478 B.C. The allies swore oaths of alliance which were to last until lumps of iron, thrown into the sea, rose again. The Delian League policy was to be established by an assembly of representatives but was to be administered by an admiral and ten treasurers appointed by Athens. It fell upon the Athenian leader, Aristides the Just, to assign an assessment of 460 talents per year, which member states paid in cash or in the form of manned ships. Right from the start, the Delian League was dominated by Athenian authority and leadership. The Delian League had its precedents: the Spartan League, the Ionian League of 499-494 B.C. and the League of 481-478 B.C. Eventually, the Greeks liberated the cities of Asia Minor and by 450 B.C., the war with the Persians came to an end.

It was at this time that the power of Athens was being felt throughout the Greek world. And as the power of Athens reached new limits, its political influence began to be extended as well. The Athenians forced city-states to join the Delian league against their will. They refused to allow city-states to withdraw from the League. And other city-states they simply refused entry into the League. Athens stationed garrisons in other city-states to

keep the peace and to make sure that Athens would receive their support, both politically and in terms of paying tribute to the League. By 454 B.C., Athenian domination of the Delian League was clear – the proof is that the League’s treasury was moved from the temple of Apollo on the island of Delos to the temple of Athena at Athens. Payments to the Delian League now became payments to the treasury of Athens.

The Age of Pericles

It was around this time, 450-430 B.C., that Athens enjoyed its greatest period of success. The period itself was dominated by the figure of Pericles and so the era has often been called the Age of Pericles. The Athenian statesman, Pericles (c.490-429 B.C.), was born of a distinguished family, was carefully educated, and rapidly rose to the highest power as leader of the Athenian democracy. Although a member of the aristoi, Pericles offered many benefits to the common people of Athens and as a result, he earned their total support. Oddly enough, the benefits he conferred upon the common people had the result of weakening the aristocracy, the social class from which he came. As the historian Thucydides pointed out, “he controlled the masses, rather than letting them control him.”

Pericles was a man of forceful character. He was an outstanding orator, something which, as we have already seen, was absolutely necessary in the political world of the Athenian Assembly. He was also honest in his control of Athenian financial affairs. Pericles first rose to political prominence in the 450s. At this time, the Athenian leadership was convinced of two things: (1) the continuation of the war with the Persians and (2) maintaining cordial relationships with Sparta. The strategy of Pericles was the exact opposite. In the Assembly he argued convincingly that the affair with Persia was in the past. He decided to concentrate instead on Sparta, which he saw as a direct threat to the vitality of the Athenian Empire. As would be evident by the end of the century, Sparta was a major threat. The reason for this is quite simple. On the one hand, Sparta chose to isolate itself from the affairs of other Greek city-states. On the other hand, Spartan isolationism appeared as a direct threat to Athens. Whether or not the threat was real, the bottom line is that Sparta and Athens were destined to become enemies.

From the 450s onward, Pericles rebuilt the city of Athens, a city ravaged by years of wars with the Persians. He used the public money from the

Delian League to build several masterpieces of 5th century Greek architecture, the Parthenon and the Propylaea. This, of course, outraged many of his fellow citizens who attacked him in the Assembly on more than one occasion. The common people, however, were quick to support Pericles for the simple matter that he gave them jobs and an income. Under Pericles, Athens became the city of Aeschylus, Socrates and Phidias, the man in charge of all public buildings and statues.

At this time Pericles also embarked on the path of aggressive imperialism. He put down rebellions and sent his Athenian armies to colonize other areas of Asia Minor. And while he was doing this, he was also trying to foster the intellectual improvement of the Athenian citizen by encouraged music and drama. Industry and commerce flourished. In 452/1 B.C., Pericles introduced pay for jurors and magistrates so that no one could be barred by poverty from service to the polis. Indeed, under Pericles, Athens was rebuilt and the population greeted him as their hero. But, there were problems on the not-too-distant horizon.

The Peloponnesian War

These problems came to a head during the Peloponnesian Wars of 431-404 B.C. As we've already seen, Sparta feared Athenian power – they believed that Athens had grown too quickly both in terms of population and military power. And Athens, of course, feared the Spartans because of their isolationist position. What we have then, is a cold war turned hot. The Peloponnesian War was a catastrophe for Athens. The chief result of the War was that the Athenian Empire was divided, the subject states of the Delian league were liberated, direct democracy failed and Pericles was ostracized. The Athenians also suffered a loss of nerve as their democracy gave way to the Reign of the Thirty Tyrants. The major result, however, was that the destruction of Athenian power made it possible for the Macedonian conquest of Greece (see Lecture 9).

By mid-century there had been several clashes between Athens and Sparta and their respective allies. In 446 B.C. a treaty of non-aggression was signed that would be valid for thirty years (a form of détente, if you will). The peace did not last. In 435 B.C., a quarrel developed between Corinth, an ally of Sparta, and Corcyra. In 433, Corcyra appealed to Athens to form an alliance. The Corinthians knew that such an alliance would make war inevitable. The combined naval power of Athens and Corcyra was the largest in Greece, and Sparta

viewed such an alliance as a direct threat. The same year, the Athenians demanded that the town of Potidaea should dismantle its defensive walls and banish its magistrates, a demand which further infuriated the Corinthians. Athens besieged the town. An assembly of the Peloponnesian league met and the Corinthians managed to convince the Spartans that war with Athens was the only solution.

Fighting began in 431 B.C. Sparta wanted to break Athenian morale by attacking Attica annually, but the Athenians merely retreated behind their fortifications until the Spartan forces retired. Pericles refused to send the Athenian infantry to the field. Instead he relied on raids on the Peloponnesus by sea. More damaging than any offensive by the Spartans was a PLAGUE that raged in Athens in 430. And the following year, Pericles died.

Over the next few years Athens and Sparta suffered so many losses that both sides were prepared to end the conflict. The Peace of Nicias was signed in 421 B.C. Hostilities were renewed in 415 when the people of Segesta (a city in Sicily) appealed to Athens for help. It was Alcibiades (c.450-404 B.C.) who persuaded the Athenian Assembly to raise a large fleet and sail to Sicily. But it was the Athenian campaign against Syracuse that eventually brought disaster. In 413 the Athenian navy lost a crucial battle. As they retreated they were cut off and destroyed. Thucydides reported that “few out of many returned home.”

The war dragged on for another eight years. Sparta sought decisive help by gaining the assistance of Persia. In 405 a Spartan admiral captured the Athenian fleet at Aegospotami, on the shores of the Hellespont. The following year, beaten into submission, Athens gave up control of its empire and had to demolish its defensive walls. By 404 B.C., Sparta had “liberated” Greece and imposed an oligarchic regime (the Thirty Tyrants), that lasted until the following year.

After the death of Pericles and the disorder of a century of warfare, the Greek city-states and direct democracy went into decline. The reason is that first one polis, then another, rose up, withdrew from the Delian League and began to assume control of their own affairs, without falling under the sphere of Athenian influence. Sparta assumed leadership of the city-states. Then it was the turn of Thebes, then Corcyra, then Corinth, the Sparta again. This fragmentation and political disorder left the door open for political power to come from an entirely different area of Greece

– Macedonia. Under Philip II, Macedonia flourished through diplomacy and military aggression. Philip took advantage of the general disorder on the Attic peninsula, and extended his control into central Greece. His armies defeated a weakened Athens. In fact, Philip gained control of all the important Greek city-states with the exception of Sparta. Philip was murdered in 336 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Alexander III. Under Alexander, the Macedonian Empire grew to become the largest empire in the ancient world – larger even than the Roman Empire at its height. Alexander the Great invaded what remained of the Persian Empire and gained control of Asia Minor. Most of Egypt fell under his armies. His armies marched as far east as the Indus River on the western border of India before he died of fever in 323 B.C. at the age of thirty-three (see Lecture 9).

Greek Culture in the Classical Age

The period from 500-323 B.C. is the Classical or Hellenic age of Greek civilization. The brilliance of the Classical Greek world rested on a blend of the old and the new. From the past came a profound religious belief in the just action of the gods and the attainment of virtue in the polis. Such a history helped develop a specific Greek “mind” in which the importance of the individual and a rationalistic spirit were paramount. The Classical Greek world was, in essence, a skillful combination of these qualities.

Athens never united all Greece. However, its culture was unchallenged. The trade routes from the Aegean brought men and their ideas from everywhere to the great cultural center of Athens. Thanks to its economic initiative, the Athenian polis was quite wealthy, and Pericles generously distributed that wealth to the Athenian citizen in a variety of forms.

For instance, the Athenian polis sponsored the production of dramas and required that wealthy citizens pay the expenses of production. At the beginning of every year, dramatists submitted their plays to the archon, or chief magistrate. Each comedian presented one play for review; those who wrote tragedy had to submit a set of three plays, plus an afterpiece called a satyr play. It was the archon who chose those dramas he considered best. The archon allotted to each tragedian his actors, paid at state expense, and a producer (choregus). On the appointed day the Athenian public would gather at the theatre of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis, paid their admission of two obols,

and witnessed a series of plays. Judges drawn by lot awarded prizes to the poet (crown of ivy), the actor (an inscription on a state list in the agora) and to the choregus (a triumphal tablet).

The Athenian dramatists were the first artists in Western society to examine such basic questions as the rights of the individual, the demands of society upon the individual and the nature of good and evil. Conflict, the basic stuff of life, is the constant element in Athenian drama.

AESCHYLUS (525-456 B.C.), the first of the great Athenian dramatists, was also the first to express the agony of the individual caught in conflict. In his trilogy of plays, *The Oresteia*, he deals with the themes of betrayal, murder and reconciliation. The first play, *The Agamemnon*, depicts Agamemnon’s return from the Trojan War and his murder by his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover. In the second play, *The Libation Bearers*, Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, avenges his father’s death by killing his mother and her lover. The last play, *The Eumenides*, works out the atonement of Orestes. The Furies, goddesses who avenged murder, demand Orestes’ death. When the jury at Orestes’ trial casts six votes to condemn and six to acquit, Athena cast the deciding vote in favor of mercy. Aeschylus used *The Eumenides* to urge reason and justice to reconcile fundamental human conflicts. Like Solon, Aeschylus believed that the world was governed by divine justice which could not be violated with impunity. When men exhibited hubris (pride or arrogance), which led them to go beyond moderation, they must be punished. Another common theme was that through suffering came knowledge. To act in accordance with the divine order meant caution and moderation.

SOPHOCLES (496-406 B.C.), the premier playwright of the second generation, also dealt with personal and political matters. In his *Antigone* he examined the relationship between the individual and the state by exploring conflict between the ties of kinship and the demands of the polis. Almost all of the plays of Sophocles stand for the precedence of divine law over human defects. In other words, human beings should do the will of the gods, even without fully understanding it, for the gods stand for justice and order.

However, whereas Aeschylus concentrated on religious matters, Sophocles dealt with the perennial problem of well-meaning men struggling, unwisely and vainly, against their own fate. The characters in the tragedies of Sophocles resist all warnings and

inescapably meet with disaster. In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus is warned not to pursue the mystery of his birth but he insists on searching for the truth about himself (that he unwittingly killed his father and married his mother). Events do not turn out as Oedipus had planned – the individual is incapable of affecting the universal laws of human existence.

EURIPIDES (c.480-406 B.C.), the last of the three great Greek tragic dramatists, also explored the theme of personal conflict within the polis and the depths of the individual. With Euripides drama enters a new, more personal phase – the gods were far less important than human beings. Euripides viewed the human soul as a place where opposing forces struggle, where strong passions such as hatred and jealousy conflict with reason. The essence of Euripides' tragedy is the flawed character – men and women who bring disaster on themselves and their loved ones because their passions overwhelm their reason.

It is the rationalist spirit of 5th century Greek philosophic thought that permeates the tragedies of Euripides. He subjected the problems of human life to critical analysis and challenged Athenian conventions. Aristophanes would criticize Euripides for introducing the art of reasoning into drama

The Greeks of the classical age not only perfected the art of drama, but of comedy as well. ARISTOPHANES (c.448-c.380 B.C.) was an ardent lover of the city and a ruthless critic of cranks and quacks. He lampooned eminent generals, at times depicting them as little more than morons. He commented snidely on Pericles, and poked fun at Socrates and Euripides. Even at the height of the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes proclaimed that peace was preferable to war. Like Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, Aristophanes used his art to dramatize his ideas on the right conduct of the citizen and the value of the polis.

The experience of the Persian and Peloponnesian wars also helped develop the beginnings of historical writing. It is in the classical age then, that we meet the father of history, HERODOTUS (c.485-425 B.C.). Born at Halicarnassus in Asia Minor, Herodotus traveled widely before settling in the Athens, the intellectual center of the Greek world. In his book, *The History*, Herodotus chronicled the rise of the Persian Empire, the origins of both Athens and Sparta, and then described the laws and customs of the Egyptians. The scope of *The History* is awesome. Lacking newspapers, any sort of communications, or ease of travel, Herodotus

wrote a history that covered all the major events of the Ancient Near East, Egypt and Greece.

The outbreak of the Peloponnesian War prompted THUCYDIDES (c.460-c.400 B.C.) to write a history of its course in the belief that it would be the greatest war in Greek history. An Athenian politician and general, Thucydides saw action in the war until he was exiled for a defeat. Exile gave him the time and opportunity to question eye-witnesses about the details of events and to visit the actual battlefields. Since he was an aristocrat – an aristoi – he had access to the inner circles, the men who made the decisions. Thucydides saw the Peloponnesian War as highly destructive to Greek character. He noted that the old, the noble, and the simple fell before ambition and lust for power. He firmly rejected any notion that the gods intervened in human affairs. In his view, the fate of men and women was entirely in their own hands.

It has been said that the Greeks are the first ancient society with which modern western society (since the Renaissance, that is) feels some sort of affinity. The ancient Greeks were clearly a people who warred and enslaved people. They often did not live up to their own ideals. However, their achievements in the areas of art, architecture, poetry, tragedy, science, mathematics, history, philosophy and government were of the highest order and worthy of emulation by the Romans and others. Western thought begins with the Greeks, who first defined man as an individual with the capacity to use his reason. Rising above magic and superstition, by the end of the fifth century, the Greeks had discovered the means to give rational order to nature and to human society.

The Greeks also created the concept (if not quite the reality) of political freedom. The state was conceived as a community of free citizens who made laws in their own interest. As a direct democracy, for example, the Athenian citizen discussed, debated and voted on issues that affected him directly. The Greek discovery that man (the citizen) is capable of governing himself was a profound one.

Underlying the Greek achievement was humanism. The Greeks expressed a belief in the worth, significance, and dignity of the individual. Man should develop his personality fully in the city-state, a development which would, in turn, create a sound city-state as well. The pursuit of excellence – arete – was paramount. Such an aspiration required effort, discipline and intelligence. Man was master of himself.

Greek Thought: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle

The political and social upheaval caused by the Persian Wars as well as continued strife between Athens and Sparta (see Lecture 7) had at least one unintended consequence. In the 5th century, a flood of new ideas poured into Athens. In general, these new ideas came as a result of an influx of Ionian thinkers into the Attic peninsula. Athens had become the intellectual and artistic center of the Greek world. Furthermore, by the mid-5th century, it had become more common for advanced thinkers to reject traditional explanations of the world of nature. As a result of the experience of a century of war, religious beliefs declined. Gods and goddesses were no longer held in the same regard as they had been a century earlier. I suppose we could generalize and say that the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars taught that the actions of men and women determine their own destiny, and not “Moirai.” Meanwhile, more traditional notions of right and wrong were called into question, and all of this was expressed in Hellenic tragedy and comedy.

The Greeks used their creative energies to explain experience by recourse to history, tragedy, comedy, art and architecture. But their creative energies were also used to “invent” philosophy, defined as “the love of wisdom.” In general, philosophy came into existence when the Greeks discovered their dissatisfaction with supernatural and mythical explanations of reality. Over time, Greek thinkers began to suspect that there was a rational or logical order to the universe.

The Pre-Socratic Philosophers

The PRE-SOCRATIC philosophers came from the city of Miletus in the region of Ionia. Miletus was a prominent trading depot and its people had direct contact with the ideas of the Near East. Around 600 B.C., Milesian thinkers “discovered” speculation after asking a simple but profound question: “what exists?” It was the Ionian natural philosopher, Thales of Miletus (c.624-548 B.C.), who answered that everything in the universe was made of water and resolves itself into water. What was so revolutionary about Thales was that he omitted the gods from his account of the origins of nature. It is also necessary to point out that Thales committed none of his views to writing. Anaximander of Miletus (c.611-c.547 B.C.), another Milesian thinker, rejected Thales, and argued instead that an indefinite substance – the Boundless – was the source of all

things. According to Anaximander, the cold and wet condensed to form the earth while the hot and dry formed the moon, sun and stars. The heat from the fire in the skies dried the earth and shrank the seas. It’s a rather fantastic scheme, but at least Anaximander sought natural explanations for the origin of the natural world.

Thales and Anaximander were “matter” philosophers – they believed that everything had its origin in a material substance. Pythagoras of Samos (c.580-507 B.C.) did not find that nature of things in material substances but in mathematical relationships. The Pythagoreans, who lived in Greek cities in southern Italy, discovered that the intervals in the musical scale could be expressed mathematically and that this principle could be extended to the universe. In other words, the universe contained an inherent mathematical order. What we witness in the Pythagoreans is the emphasis on form rather than matter, and here we move from sense perception to the logic of mathematics.

Parmenides of Elea (c.515-450 B.C.), also challenged the fundamental views of the Ionian philosophers that all things emerged from one substance. What Parmenides did was to apply logic to the arguments of the Pythagoreans, thus setting the groundwork of formal logic. He argued that reality is one, eternal and unchanging. We “know” reality not by the senses, which are capable of deception, but through the human mind, not through experience, but through reason. As we shall see, this concept shall become central to the philosophic thought of Plato.

Perhaps the most important of all the Pre-Socratic philosophers was Heraclitus of Ephesus (fl. 500 B.C.). Known as “the weeping philosopher” because of his pessimistic view of human nature and “the dark one” because of the mystical obscurity of his thought, Heraclitus wrote *On Nature*, fragments of which we still possess. Whereas the Pythagoreans had emphasized harmony, Heraclitus suggested that life was maintained by a tension of opposites, fighting a continuous battle in which neither side could win a final victory. Movement and the flux of change were unceasing for individuals, but the structure of the cosmos constant. This law of individual flux within a permanent universal framework was guaranteed by the Logos, an intelligent governing principle materially embodied as fire, and identified with soul or life.

Fire is the primordial element out of which all else has arisen – change (becoming) is the first principle

of the universe. Cratylus, a follower of Heraclitus, once made the remark that “You cannot step twice into the same river.” The water will be different water the second time, and if we call the river the same, it is because we see its reality in its form. The logical conclusion of this is the opposite of flux, that is, a belief in an absolute, unchanging reality of which the world of change and movement is only a quasi-existing phantom, phenomenal, not real.

Democritus of Abdera (c.460-370 B.C.) argued that knowledge was derived through sense perception – the senses illustrate to us that change does occur in nature. However, Democritus also retained Parmenides’ confidence in human reason. His universe consisted of empty space and an infinite number of atoms (a-tomos, the “uncuttable”). Eternal and indivisible, these atoms moved in the void of space. An atomic theory to the core, Democritus saw all matter constructed of atoms which accounted for all change in the natural world.

What the Pre-Socratic thinkers from Thales to Democritus had done was nothing less than amazing – they had given to nature a rational and non-mythical foundation. This new approach allowed a critical analysis of theories, whereas mythical explanations relied on blind faith alone. Such a spirit even found its way into medicine, where the Greek physician Hippocrates of Cos (c.460-c.377 B.C.) was able to distinguish between magic and medicine. Physicians observed ill patients, classified symptoms and then made predictions about the course of a disease. For instance, of epilepsy, he wrote: “It is not, in my opinion, any more divine or more scared than other diseases, but has a natural cause, and its supposed divine origin is due to men’s inexperience, and to their wonder at its peculiar character.”

The Sophists

Into such an atmosphere of change came the traveling teachers, the Sophists. The Sophists were a motley bunch – some hailed from the Athenian polis or other city-states, but the majority came from Ionia, in Asia Minor. The Sophists were men whose responsibility it was to train and educate the sons of Athenian citizens. There were no formal school as we know them today. Instead, these were peripatetic schools, meaning that the instructor would walk with students and talk with them – for a fee, of course. The Sophists taught the skills (sophia) of rhetoric and oratory. Both of these arts were essential for the education of the Athenian citizenry. After all, it was the sons of the citizens who would

eventually find themselves debating important issues in the Assembly and the Council of Five Hundred. Rhetoric can be described as the art of composition, while oratory was the art of public speaking.

The Sophists abandoned science, philosophy, mathematics and ethics. What they taught was the subtle art of persuasion. A Sophist was a person who could argue eloquently – and could prove a position whether that position was correct or incorrect. In other words, what mattered was persuasion and not truth. The Sophists were also relativists. They believed that there was no such thing as a universal or absolute truth, valid at all times. According to Protagoras (c.485-c.411 B.C.), “Man is the measure of all things.” Everything is relative and there are no values because man, individual man, is the measure of all things. Nothing is good or bad since everything depends on the individual. Gorgias of Leontini (c.485-c.380 B.C.), who visited Athens in 427, was a well-paid teacher of rhetoric and famous for his saying that a man could not know anything. And if he could, he could not describe it and if he could describe it, no one would understand him.

The Sophistic movement of the fifth century B.C. has been the subject of much discussion and there is no single view about their significance. Plato’s treatment of the Sophists in his late dialogue, the *Sophist*, is hardly flattering. He does not treat them as real seekers after truth but as men whose only concern was making money and teaching their students success in argument by whatever means. Aristotle said that a Sophist was “one who made money by sham wisdom.”

At their very best, the Sophists challenged the accepted values of the fifth century. They wanted the freedom to sweep away old conventions as a way of finding a better understanding of the universe, the gods and man. The Sophists have been compared with the philosophes of the 18th century Enlightenment who also used criticism and reason to wipe out anything they deemed was contrary to human reason. Regardless of what we think of the Sophists as a group or individually, they certainly did have the cumulative effect of further degrading a mythical understanding of the universe and of man.

Socrates

From the ranks of the Sophists came SOCRATES (c.469-399 B.C.), perhaps the most noble and wisest Athenian to have ever lived. He was born sometime in 469, we don’t know for sure. What we do know is that his father was Sophroniscus, a stone

cutter, and his mother, Phaenarete, was a midwife. Sophroniscus was a close friend of the son of Aristides the Just (c.550-468 B.C.), and the young Socrates was familiar with members of the circle of Pericles. In his youth he fought as a hoplite at Potidaea (432-429), Delium (424) and Amphipolis (422) during the Peloponnesian Wars. To be sure, his later absorption in philosophy made him neglect his private affairs and he eventually fell to a level of comparative poverty. He was perhaps more in love with the study of philosophy than with his family – that his wife Xanthippe was shrew is a later tale. In Plato's dialogue, the *Crito*, we meet a Socrates concerned with the future of his three sons. Just the same, his entire life was subordinated to "the supreme art of philosophy." He was a good citizen but held political office only once – he was elected to the Council of Five Hundred in 406 B.C. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates remarks that:

The true champion of justice, if he intends to survive even for a short time, must necessarily confine himself to private life and leave politics alone.

What we can be sure about Socrates was that he was remarkable for living the life he preached. Taking no fees, Socrates started and dominated an argument wherever the young and intelligent would listen, and people asked his advice on matters of practical conduct and educational problems.

Socrates was not an attractive man – he was snub-nosed, prematurely bald, and overweight. But, he was strong in body and the intellectual master of every one with whom he came into contact. The Athenian youth flocked to his side as he walked the paths of the agora. They clung to his every word and gesture. He was not a Sophist himself, but a philosopher, a lover of wisdom.

In 399 B.C., Socrates was charged with impiety by a jury of five hundred of his fellow citizens. His most famous student, Plato, tells us, that he was charged "as an evil-doer and curious person, searching into things under the earth and above the heavens; and making the worse appear the better cause, and teaching all this to others." He was convicted to death by a margin of six votes. Oddly enough, the jury offered Socrates the chance to pay a small fine for his impiety. He rejected it. He also rejected the pleas of Plato and other students who had a boat waiting for him at Piraeus that would take him to freedom. But Socrates refused to break the law. What kind of citizen would he be if he refused to accept the judgment of the jury? No citizen at all. He spent his last days with his friends before

he drank the fatal dose of hemlock.

The charge made against Socrates – disbelief in the state's gods – implied un-Athenian activities which would corrupt the young and the state if preached publicly. Meletus, the citizen who brought the indictment, sought precedents in the impiety trials of Pericles' friends. Although Socrates was neither a heretic nor an agnostic, there was prejudice against him. He also managed to provoke hostility. For instance, the Delphic oracle is said to have told Chaerephon that no man was wiser than Socrates. During his trial Socrates had the audacity to use this as a justification of his examination of the conduct of all Athenians, claiming that in exposing their falsehoods, he had proved the god right – he at least knew that he knew nothing. Although this episode smacks of Socrates' well-known irony, he clearly did believe that his mission was divinely inspired.

Socrates has been described as a gadfly – a first-class pain. The reason why this charge is somewhat justified is that he challenged his students to think for themselves – to use their minds to answer questions. He did not reveal answers. He did not reveal truth. Many of his questions were, on the surface, quite simple: what is courage? what is virtue? what is duty? But what Socrates discovered, and what he taught his students to discover, was that most people could not answer these fundamental questions to his satisfaction, yet all of them claimed to be courageous, virtuous and dutiful. So, what Socrates knew, was that he knew nothing, upon this sole fact lay the source of his wisdom. Socrates was not necessarily an intelligent man – but he was a wise man. And there is a difference between the two.

Plato

Socrates wrote nothing himself. What we know of him comes from the writings of two of his closest friends, Xenophon and Plato. Although Xenophon (c.430-c.354 B.C.) did write four short portraits of Socrates, it is almost to Plato alone that we know anything of Socrates. PLATO (c.427-347 B.C.) came from a family of aristoi, served in the Peloponnesian War, and was perhaps Socrates' most famous student. He was twenty-eight years old when Socrates was put to death. At the age of forty, Plato established a school at Athens for the education of Athenian youth. The Academy, as it was called, remained in existence from 387 B.C. to A.D. 529, when it was closed by Justinian, the Byzantine emperor.

Our knowledge of Socrates comes to us from numerous dialogues which Plato wrote after 399. In nearly every dialogue – and there are more than thirty that we know about – Socrates is the main speaker. The style of the Plato’s dialogue is important – it is the Socratic style that he employs throughout. A Socratic dialogue takes the form of question-answer, question-answer, question-answer. It is a dialectical style as well. Socrates would argue both sides of a question in order to arrive at a conclusion. Then that conclusion is argued against another assumption and so on. Perhaps it is not that difficult to understand why Socrates was considered a gadfly!

There is a reason why Socrates employed this style, as well as why Plato recorded his experience with Socrates in the form of a dialogue. Socrates taught Plato a great many things, but one of the things Plato more or less discovered on his own was that mankind is born with knowledge. That is, knowledge is present in the human mind at birth. It is not so much that we “learn” things in our daily experience, but that we “recollect” them. In other words, this knowledge is already there. This may explain why Socrates did not give his students answers, but only questions. His job was not to teach truth but to show his students how they could “pull” truth out of their own minds (it is for this reason that Socrates often considered himself a midwife in the labor of knowledge). And this is the point of the dialogues. For only in conversation, only in dialogue, can truth and wisdom come to the surface.

Plato’s greatest and most enduring work was his lengthy dialogue, *The Republic*. This dialogue has often been regarded as Plato’s blueprint for a future society of perfection. I do not accept this opinion. Instead, I would like to suggest that *The Republic* is not a blueprint for a future society, but rather, is a dialogue which discusses the education necessary to produce such a society. It is an education of a strange sort – he called it *paideia*. Nearly impossible to translate into modern idiom, *paideia* refers to the process whereby the physical, mental and spiritual development of the individual is of paramount importance. It is the education of the total individual.

The Republic discusses a number of topics including the nature of justice, statesmanship, ethics and the nature of politics. It is in *The Republic* that Plato suggests that democracy was little more than a “charming form of government.” And this he is writing less than one hundred years after the brilliant age of Periclean democracy. So much for

democracy. After all, it was Athenian democracy that convicted Socrates. For Plato, the citizens are the least desirable participants in government. Instead, a philosopher-king or guardian should hold the reigns of power. An aristocracy if you will – an aristocracy of the very best – the best of the *aristoi*.

Plato’s *Republic* also embodies one of the clearest expressions of his theory of knowledge. In *The Republic*, Plato asks what is knowledge? what is illusion? what is reality? how do we know? what makes a thing, a thing? what can we know? These are epistemological questions – that is, they are questions about knowledge itself. He distinguishes between the reality presented to us by our senses – sight, touch, taste, sound and smell – and the essence or Form of that reality. In other words, reality is always changing – knowledge of reality is individual, it is particular, it is knowledge only to the individual knower, it is not universal.

Building upon the wisdom of Socrates and Parmenides, Plato argued that reality is known only through the mind. There is a higher world, independent of the world we may experience through our senses. Because the senses may deceive us, it is necessary that this higher world exist, a world of Ideas or Forms – of what is unchanging, absolute and universal. In other words, although there may be something from the phenomenal world which we consider beautiful or good or just, Plato postulates that there is a higher unchanging reality of the beautiful, goodness or justice. To live in accordance with these universal standards is the good life – to grasp the Forms is to grasp ultimate truth.

The unphilosophical man – that is, all of us – is at the mercy of sense impressions and unfortunately, our sense impressions oftentimes fail us. Our senses deceive us. But because we trust our senses, we are like prisoners in a cave – we mistake shadows on a wall for reality. This is the central argument of Plato’s ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE which appears in Book VII of *The Republic*.

Plato realized that the Athenian state, and along with it, Athenian direct democracy, had failed to realize its lofty ideals. Instead, the citizens sent Socrates to his death and direct democracy had failed. The purpose of *The Republic* was something of a warning to all Athenians that without respect for law, leadership and a sound education for the young, their city would continue to decay. Plato wanted to rescue Athens from degeneration by reviving that sense of community that had at

one time made the polis great. The only way to do this, Plato argued, was to give control over to the Philosopher-Kings, men who had philosophical knowledge, and to give little more than “noble lies” to everyone else. The problem as Plato saw it was that power and wisdom had traveled divergent paths – his solution was to unite them in the guise of the Philosopher-King.

Aristotle

Plato’s most famous student was ARISTOTLE (384-322 B.C.). His father was the personal physician to Philip of Macedon and Aristotle was, for a time at least, the personal tutor of Alexander the Great. Aristotle styled himself a biologist – he is said to have spent his honeymoon collecting specimens at the seashore. He too was charged with impiety, but fled rather than face the charges – I suppose that tells you something about Aristotle.

At the age of eighteen, Aristotle became the student at the Academy of Plato (who was then sixty years of age). Aristotle also started his own school, the Lyceum in 335 B.C. It too was closed by Justinian in A.D. 529. Aristotle was a “polymath” – he knew a great deal about nearly everything. Very little of Aristotle’s writings remain extant. But his students recorded nearly everything he discussed at the Lyceum. In fact, the books to which Aristotle’s name is attributed are really little more than student notebooks. This may account for the fact that Aristotle’s philosophy is one of the more difficult to digest. Regardless, Aristotle lectured on astronomy, physics, logic, aesthetics, music, drama, tragedy, poetry, zoology, ethics and politics. The one field in which he did not excel was mathematics. Plato, on the other hand, was a master of geometry.

As a scientist, Aristotle’s epistemology is perhaps closer to our own. For Aristotle did not agree with Plato that there is an essence or Form or Absolute behind every object in the phenomenal world. I suppose you could argue that Aristotle came from the Jack Webb school of epistemology – “nothing but the facts, Mam.” Or, as one historian has put it: “The point is, that an elephant, when present, is noticed.” In other words, whereas Plato suggested that man was born with knowledge, Aristotle argued that knowledge comes from experience. And there, in the space of just a few decades, we have the essence of those two philosophical traditions which have occupied the western intellectual tradition for the past 2500 years. Rationalism – knowledge is a priori (comes before experience) and Em-

piricism – knowledge is a posteriori (comes after experience).

It is almost fitting that one of Plato’s greatest students ought to have also been his greatest critics. Like Democritus, Aristotle had confidence in sense perception. As a result, he had little patience with Plato’s higher world of the Forms. However, Aristotle argued that there were universal principles but that they are derived from experience. He could not accept, as had Plato, that there was a world of Forms beyond space and time. Aristotle argued that there were Forms and Absolutes, but that they resided in the thing itself. From our experience with horses, for instance, we can deduce the essence of “horseness.” This universal, as it had been for Plato, was the true object of human knowledge.

It perhaps goes without saying that the western intellectual tradition, as well as the history of western philosophy, must begin with an investigation of ancient Greek thought. From Thales and the matter philosophers to the empiricism of Aristotle, the Greeks passed on to the west a spirit of rational inquiry that is very much our own intellectual property. And while we may never think of Plato or Aristotle as we carry on in our daily lives, it was their inquiry into knowledge that has served as the foundation for all subsequent inquiries. Indeed, many have argued with W. H. Auden that “had Greek civilization never existed we would never have become fully conscious, which is to say that we would never have become, for better or worse, fully human.”

From Polis to Cosmopolis: Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic World, 323-30 B.C.

There is little doubt that the Peloponnesian War ultimately signified the end of the city-state as a creative force which fulfilled the lives of the citizenry (on the Peloponnesian War, see Lecture 7). Throughout the 5th and 4th centuries, the political history of the Greek world degenerated into oligarchy. Athenian direct democracy became a spent force as Athens lost its leadership in the Greek world after its defeat at the hands of the Spartans. But Spartan domination did not last very long. Full of arrogance and pride, Sparta found itself engaged in war after war. The three leading city-states of Athens, Sparta and Thebes traded positions of influence and power, sometimes two states joining against the other for protection.

Although Athens was rebuilding itself and Sparta

had been invaded by victorious Theban armies, the real center of Greek power in the first half of the 4th century Greek world came from the Macedonian kingdom to the north, an area to which the Attic Greeks regarded with disdain since that kingdom was inhabited by barbaroi.

Philip of Macedon

In 359 B.C., PHILIP II of Macedon (383-336 B.C.) came to the throne by a rather typical procedure – a round of family assassinations. Philip was an energetic and ambitious man – if anything motivated him besides greed, it was his awareness of just how divided and disordered the Greek world had become. This disorder was a direct result of a century of warfare and in particular, the Peloponnesian Wars. With this in mind, Philip set out to conquer the Hellenic world. He accomplished this task by treachery, secrecy, speed and dishonesty. He quieted his rivals, crushed rebellions and made secret treaties which were broken almost as quickly as they were made.

In 338, Philip announced that he would marry Cleopatra, the daughter of a wealthy Macedonian family. This is interesting since Philip was already married to Olympias! Alexander was Philip's first born son and had the claim to the throne. But Philip confined Olympias on the grounds that she had committed adultery and encouraged rumors that Alexander was illegitimate. Philip then arranged for a wedding feast – it turned out to be an intense affair. Alexander entered the room and sat next Philip and said: "when my mother gets married again I'll invite you to her wedding." Such a remark did nothing to improve anyone's temper.

Throughout the evening enormous quantities of wine were drunk. At last, Attalus, the bride's uncle arose, a bit unsteady, and proposed a toast. He called upon the gods that there might be born a legitimate successor to the Macedonia Kingdom. Infuriated, Alexander jumped to his feet and said: "are you calling me a bastard?" He then threw his cup of wine in the face of Attalus, who then did the same to Alexander. Philip stood, very drunk, and lunged forward with his sword drawn. His target was not Attalus but Alexander. However, Philip missed, tripped over a foot stool, and fell face first on the floor. Alexander looked about him – looked at his father's worthless favorites – and said: "That, gentlemen, is the man who's been preparing to cross from Europe into Asia, and he can't even make it from one couch to the next!" Here was the moment of crisis. Who would succeed Philip?

By this time, Olympias had clearly sided with her son Alexander. The night before her wedding to Philip, Olympias had a dream that her child would be a divine king. And she had always taught him that he was not merely the next in line, but from his youth, she told him to think he was a king in his own right. There is little doubt that Alexander and Olympias wished Philip out of the way. And that opportunity appeared in 336 B.C.

Philip arranged a massive festival to honor the marriage of Alexander's sister. With perfect timing, Philip's young wife Cleopatra had just given birth to a son. Meanwhile, Alexander had been all but isolated from his father's court. On the second day of the festivities, Philip was murdered by member of his own bodyguard. As the king entered the arena, a man drew a short, broad-bladed Celtic sword and thrust it into Philip's chest. Philip died immediately. Philip's murderer was Pausanias, who was also Philip's lover. Philip jilted Pausanias the year before for another young boy so the cause of Philip's murder was not really political, but sexual. However, evidence exists that connects Pausanias to Olympias, who promised him rewards and high honors if he killed Philip.

But Pausanias knew too much – although Olympias promised him an escape after he had done the dirty deed, the fact is that Olympias had to get rid of Pausanias as well. He was killed minutes after Philip was murdered by three soldiers loyal to Alexander and his mother. This is a bit of intrigue which, as we shall see, shall be repeated throughout the history of the Roman and Byzantine empires.

Alexander the Great

The throne fell to Philip's son, Alexander III (356-323 B.C.) or, as he is better known, ALEXANDER THE GREAT. When Alexander gained the throne he had just reached his 20th birthday. Within fifteen months he stamped out rebellions, marched into various Greek cities demanding submission, sent his armies as far north as the Danube River, and destroyed the city of Thebes. In 334, and with 37,000 men under his command, he marched into Asia, still conquering lands for his empire. He added new lands to old and carefully consolidated his conquests by founding Greek cities abroad. Of the seventy cities he founded, more than twenty bear his name. By 327, Alexander's armies had moved as far east as India (see map). However, his troops were exhausted and could go no further. We can only wonder how much more territory Alexander would have added to the Empire had he had a

fresh supply of troops.

Regardless, his illustrious career as leader and military strategist came to an end in 323 B.C., when he died from fever after a particularly wild party. He was 33 years old. Alexander has been portrayed as an idealistic visionary and as an arrogant and ruthless conqueror. Well, how did he view himself? He sought to imitate Achilles, the hero of Homer's Iliad. He claimed to be descended from Hercules, a Greek hero worshipped as a god. In the Egyptian fashion, he called himself pharaoh. After victories against the Persians, he adopted features of their rule. He called himself the Great King. He urged his followers to bow down before him, in Persian fashion. He also married Roxane, a Persian captive, and arranged for more than 10,000 of his soldiers to do the same. He wore Persian clothes and used Persians as administrators. By doing this, Alexander was trying to fuse the cultures of East and West, of Asia Minor and Greece. This fusion, and all that it came to represent, is what historians mean by the expression Hellenization.

He was loved by his loyal soldiers but his fellow Macedonians often objected to him. More than one assassination attempt was made on his life. The cultural legacy of Alexander was that Hellenic art, drama, philosophy, architecture, literature, and language was diffused throughout the Near East. The cities he founded became the spring boards for the diffusion of Hellenistic culture. Of the 60 to 70,000 mercenaries he summoned from Greece, nearly 40,000 remained to inhabit these cities. His vision of empire no doubt appealed to the Romans, a people who would eventually inherit Alexander's Empire and, as we shall see, quite a bit more. However, when Alexander died in 323 B.C., the classical age of Greece came to an abrupt end. Something very different was about to emerge.

From Polis to Cosmopolis

The immediate cause for the collapse of Classical Greece was the experience of a century of warfare. The city-state could no longer supply a tolerable way of life for its citizens. Intellectuals began to turn away from the principles of direct democracy and embrace the idea of the monarchy. For instance, Plato gave up on democracy in despair and insisted on a Philosopher-King, something which he argued in *The Republic*. After all, the same democracy that had made Athens so great in the mid-5th century, had also killed his friend and teacher Socrates. Furthermore, the transition from the Greece of Pericles to that of Alexander the Great,

involves something more than just the experience of warfare.

On a spiritual level, the 4th century witnessed a permanent change in the attitudes of all Greeks. What resulted was a new attitude toward life and its expectations – a new world view. In the classical world of the polis, public and private lives were fused. Duty to the city-state was in itself virtuous. But in the Hellenistic world, public and private lives were made separate, and the individual's only duty was to himself. In art, sculpture, architecture, or philosophy or wherever we choose to look, we see more attention paid to individualism and introspection. Universal principles of truth – Plato's Ideas and Forms – were rejected in favor of individual traits. By the 4th century, Greek citizens became more interested in their private affairs rather than in the affairs of the polis. For example, in the 5th century, we will find comedies in which the polis is criticized, parodied and lampooned. But in the 4th century, the subject matter has changed and has turned to private and domestic life. In other words, whereas 5th century comedies focused on the relationship between the citizen and city-state, 4th century comedies made jokes about cooks, the price of fish, and incompetent doctors.

But, the question remains – how do we account for the DECLINE OF THE POLIS? Why was this brilliant experiment in direct democracy destined for failure?

In general, the democracy of the city-state was made for the amateur and not the professional. The ideal of the polis was that every individual was to take a direct role in political, economic, spiritual and social affairs. But perhaps this was just too much responsibility to place on the shoulders of the citizens. For instance, we have Socrates, the most noble Athenian. He spent his entire life trying to fathom the mysteries of life: what is virtue? what is justice? what is beauty? what is the best form of government? what is the good life? He didn't know the answer to these questions but he tried to find out by asking as many people as many questions as possible. What Socrates found was that no Athenian citizen could give him a definition of any moral or intellectual virtue that would survive ten minutes of his questioning. The effect of such a discovery on the part of the young men of Athens was profound. Faith in the polis was shattered for how could the polis train its citizens to be virtuous if no one knew what it meant to be virtuous.

With this story of Socrates in mind, we turn to his

most brilliant student, Plato. His Republic, his dialogue on the education required to fashion a new state, rejects both the polis and the idea of direct democracy. Just the fact that Plato was thinking in terms of an ideal state should tell you something – people don't think of ideal societies when times are good. Obviously, something was very wrong. Plato's solution was that the training of citizens in virtue should be left to those who understand the universal meaning of virtue, and in Plato's mind, that meant those people who had emerged from the cave of illusion and who had seen the light of reality, that is, a Philosopher-King. This is indeed a far cry from the ideal of direct democracy and the city-state as embraced by a Solon, a Cleisthenes or a Pericles.

The history of the Greek world following the death of Alexander is one of warfare and strife as his generals struggled for control of Alexander's empire. By 275 B.C., Alexander's world had been divided into the three kingdoms of Macedonia (Antigonids), Western Asia (Seleucids) and Egypt (Ptolemaic). The kingdom of Pergamum (southern Asia Minor) was soon added as the fourth Hellenistic monarchy.

Hellenistic Greece was a predominately urban culture. The cities founded by Alexander were centers of government and trade as well as culture. These were large cities by ancient standards. For instance, Alexandria in Egypt contained perhaps 500,000 people. The Greeks brought their temples, their theatres and schools to other cities, thus exporting their culture and Greek culture became a way of life. The library at Alexandria is said to have contained some half a million volumes. The upper classes began to copy the Greek spirit. They sent their children to Greek schools and the Greek language (Koine) became a common, almost international language, in the same way that Latin was for Europe for fifteen centuries, or French in the 19th century.

What the breakdown of Alexander's empire had accomplished was nothing less than the Hellenization of the Mediterranean world. Cultures once foreign to the Hellenic world now became more Greek-like – they were Hellenized. One of the most important developments in association with this process of Hellenization, was the shift from the world of the polis to the new world of the cosmopolis. Such a shift was decisive in creating the Hellenistic world as a world of conflicting identities, and when identities are challenged or changed, intense internal conflicts are the result.

We can identify this sense of conflict in the transition from Classical to Hellenistic philosophy. Classical Greek philosophy, the philosophy of the Sophists and of Socrates in the 5th century, was concerned with the citizen's intimate relationship with the polis or city-state. You can see this clearly in the philosophy of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Big questions such as what is the good life, what is the best form of government and what is virtue loomed large in their thinking. When we enter the world of the Hellenistic philosopher we encounter something very different. We must ask why?

The world of the polis had clearly given way to the world of the cosmopolis. And with that change from the smallness of the city-state to the immensity of the world-city, there were corresponding changes in the world view. The city-state was no longer run by citizens, citizens whose private and public duties were identical. In the world-state, bureaucrats and officials took over the duties formerly given over to citizens. Citizens lost their sense of importance as they became subjects under the control of vast bureaucratic kingdoms. From the face-to-face contact of the Athenian public Assembly, the people now became little more than numbers. As a result, they lost their identity.

Hellenistic Philosophy

This tendency was reflected in philosophy, which turned to concern itself with the possibilities of survival in a world that had become much larger, less personal, and more complex. Philosophy then, became less the love of wisdom, than it did a therapy used to cope with a strange, fragmented world of disorder and isolation. And as a result of this, there were two schools of thought – two therapies – which made their appearance during the Hellenistic Age. Both were therapies addressing themselves to an individualistic age. People seemed less concerned about the nature of politics and their role in it. They became more concerned about their own lives and were searching for some kind of personal guidance. And all this was reflected in Hellenistic thought as THERAPY.

It was EPICURUS (341-270) who founded the school of Epicureanism at the end of the fourth century. Epicurus taught the value of passivity and withdrawal from public life altogether. Individual happiness could be found anywhere, and just just within the confines of the polis. What politics did was to deprive the citizen of his self-sufficiency and his freedom to choose and to act. Wealth and power did little more than provoke anxiety. Epicurus ar-

gued that people should strive for inner peace and tranquility and live pleasurable lives while avoiding mental and physical pain. The wise person should withdraw from the world and study philosophy and enjoy the companionship of a few close friends.

Epicurus suggested a theory of nature that had no place for the activity of gods. That the gods could inflict suffering after death was the major cause of human anxiety. Epicurus adopted the atomic theory of Democritus, who taught that in a universe of colliding atoms there could be no room for divine activity (see Lecture 8). While he perhaps accepted the existence of gods, he said it was pointless to worry about them.

People could achieve happiness when their bodies were free from pain and their minds “released from worry and fear.” Of course, Epicurus did not mean that the individual ought to indulge in senseless hedonism. Together with Aristotle, the motto of Epicurus could have been something like, “nothing to excess.” By opening his philosophy to all men and women, as well as slaves, Epicurus created a therapy keenly adapted to the Hellenistic world of cosmopolitan kingdoms.

The school of Stoicism was founded by Zeno (c.336-c.265 B.C.) in the late 4th century. Zeno was born at Citium, a small Phoenician-Greek city on Cyprus. His father, Mnaseas, was a merchant and, according to Diogenes Laertius (fl. 2nd century A.D.), he brought back many Socratic books to Zeno when he was still a boy. At the age of twenty-two Zeno went to Athens and in 300 he started his school, first called the Zenonians and later called the Stoics because he gave his lectures in the Stoa Poikile, or Painted Colonnade, where he soon became a familiar part of Athenian intellectual life. His followers were known as the Stoics or “Colonaders.” Diogenes Laertius relates that Zeno used to set out his arguments while walking back and forth in the Painted Stoa which was also named for Peisianax, but [called] “Painted” because of the painting by Polygnotus. He wanted to make sure that his space was unobstructed by bystanders; for under the Thirty Tyrants 1400 citizens had been slaughtered in it. Still, people came to listen to him and for this reason they were called Stoics; and his followers were given the same name, although they had previously been called Zenonians, as Epicurus also says in his letters.

Zeno taught that a single, divine plan governed the universe. To find happiness, one must act in harmony with this divine plan. By cultivating a sense

of duty and self-discipline, one can learn to accept their fate – they will then achieve some kind of inner peace, freedom and tranquility. The Stoics believed that all people belong to the single family of mankind and so one should not withdraw from the world, but try to make something of the world. The Stoics believed that the universe contained a principle of order, called the Divine Fire, God or Divine Reason (Logos). This was the principle that formed the basis for reality – it permeated all things. Because men was part of the universe, he too shared in the Logos. Since reason was common to all, human beings were essentially brothers – it made no difference whether one were Greek, barbarian, free man or slave since all mankind were fellow citizens of a world community. It was the Stoics who took the essentials of Socratic thought – a morality of self-mastery based on knowledge – and applied it beyond the Athenian polis to the world community.

By teaching that there was a single divine plan (Logos), and that the world constituted a single society, it was Zeno who gave perfect expression to the cosmopolitan nature of the post-Alexandrine world. Stoicism, then, offered an answer to the problem of alienation and fragmentation created by the decline of the polis. Surrounded by a world of uncertainty, Stoicism promised individual happiness.

Both Epicureanism and Stoicism are therapies which reflected the change in man’s social and political life during the Hellenistic Age. On the one hand, both therapies suggest a disenchantment with the overtly political world of a Pericles or Thucydides, Athenian or Spartan. So, they can be seen as direct reactions to the philosophy of both Plato and Aristotle. On the other hand, the Stoics and Epicureans also reflect profound social changes within Greece itself. Greek society had become more complex and more urban as a result of Alexander’s conquests. Politics fell into the hands of the wealthy few and the citizens were left with nothing. And Hellenistic politics became little more than an affair of aristocrats and their bureaucratic lackeys and experts.

Much of this is similar to modern times. Our government has grown too complex and too large. Despite our democratic institutions, our society is ordered and controlled by wealthy elites and bureaucrats, many of whom we cannot even identify because their existence is not individual but corporate. Modern society has become and remains impersonal, bureaucratic and authoritarian. We believe we are in control. In reality, we are still prisoners in Plato’s cave where our illusions are fed to

us by digital technology.

Hellenistic philosophers questioned such an order and in general, turned to the inner harmony of the individual – a form of therapy with which to deal with an increasingly cold and impersonal world. This is an ironic situation. A culture congratulates itself that it has been able to progress from simplicity to complexity. But with complexity – improvement? progress? – the control of one’s life seems to fall away. We are not in control since control is in the hands of unidentifiable entities.

Given this, Hellenistic Greeks turned to personal philosophies – therapies – for comfort and, if you will, salvation. What do we turn to? Do we turn inward? No! the majority of us “find ourselves” reflected in things external to us. We become members of “the club,” losing our own identity in collective identities. We are asked to say, “don’t worry, be happy.” In the Hellenistic world, Stoicism became the point of view and therapy of choice for individuals who were still trying to bring order out of the chaos of Hellenistic life. The Epicureans appealed to those people who had resigned themselves to all the chaos and instead turned to the quest for pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

However, Stoicism and Epicureanism were not the only two therapies available for those who needed them. The SKEPTICS simply denied that there was anything close to true knowledge. According to the 4th century Skeptic Cratylus, since everything is changing, one cannot step once into the same river, because both that river and oneself are changing. Cratylus took his brand of skepticism to an alarming degree, arguing eventually that communication was impossible because since the speaker, listener and words were changing, whatever meaning might have been intended by the words would be altered by the time they were heard. He is therefore supposed to have refused to discuss anything and only to have wiggled his finger when someone spoke, to indicate that he had heard something but that it would be pointless to reply, since everything was changing.

Whereas the Epicureans withdrew from the evils of the world, and the Stoics sought happiness by working in harmony with the Logos, the Skeptics held that one could achieve some kind of spiritual equilibrium only by accepting that none of the beliefs by which people lived were true or could bring happiness. Speculative thought did not bring happiness either. For the most part, the Skeptics were suspicious of ideas and maintained no great love for

intellectuals.

The Cynics rejected all material possessions and luxuries and lived simple lives totally divorced from the hustle and bustle of the Hellenistic world-city. The most famous of the Cynics was Diogenes the Dog (412-323 B.C.). Diogenes lived in a bath tub. He carried a lantern in daylight, proclaiming to all that he was looking for a “virtuous man.” It is said that one day Alexander the Great approached Diogenes, who was near death, and asked if there was anything that he could do for him. Diogenes is said to have replied, “would you mind moving – you are blocking the sun.” Plato described Diogenes as “Socrates gone mad.” He called himself “citizen of the world and when asked what the finest thing in the world might be, replied”freedom of speech.” Diogenes was a serious teacher who, disillusioned with a corrupt society and hostile world, protested by advocating happiness as self-mastery of an inner spiritual freedom from all wants except the barest minimum. In his crusade against the corrupting influence of money, power, fame, pleasure and luxury, Diogenes extolled the painful effort involved in the mental and physical training required for self-sufficiency.

And finally, there were the Neo-Platonists who combined Plato’s ideas with the ancient religions that flourished in Asia Minor. The Neo-Platonists used the Allegory of the Cave as their point of departure. They took the Allegory and “socialized” it by arguing mankind can overcome this material world by mastering the scared lore and special knowledge contained in the mystery cults.

From Epicurean to Stoic and from Skeptic and Cynic to Neo-Platonist, none of these therapies provided any sort of relief for the ordinary man and woman. After all, these therapies were specifically “upper class” philosophies, intended for citizens feeling the burdens of the cosmopolis upon their social, political and economic life. In other words, one studied with Zeno or Diogenes or they read the books of Epicurus or the Neo-Platonists. The common person required something more concrete, more practical and less demanding as well as more helpful than the philosophic therapists could offer. They found what they wanted in the mystery cults, cults which could explain their suffering in less complex and more down-to-earth terms.

The most popular cults were those associated with a mother-goddess such as Ishtar (Sumer) or Isis (Egypt) or those that taught the coming of a savior such as Osiris and Mithra. The savior would come

to deliver man from the forces of darkness which had threatened to consume him. The mother-goddess cult taught that one should take comfort in the love that the mother figure offered and await with patience for one's death when one would be reunited with the mother-goddess. The savior cult invited one to worship a hero-god who would then offer protection from evil. Many of these cults offered beliefs in the resurrection of the body after death. Hopefully you can see that these cults were an amalgamation of Hebrew monotheism and Egyptian and Sumerian polytheism. We should also not forget that although faith in the pantheon of gods and goddesses declined during the Hellenic or Classical age of Greece, its decline was felt most strongly amongst the citizenry and not the common people, who continued to maintain their traditional beliefs of gods and goddesses of the hearth.

The mystery cults usually enforced certain dietary rules and also required participation in various rites. The cults were not exclusive and therefore anyone could join at will. The mystery cults afforded a community of feeling and aspiration that took the

place of the now defunct polis. When it first appeared in the Roman world, Christianity was identified by the Romans as merely another mystery cult. Only gradually did it dawn on the Romans that they were facing a completely new religious phenomenon. And I mention this now in order to suggest that the mystery cults would contribute to the overall Christianization of the Roman Empire. In other words, when Christianity did make its appearance, the mystery cults had already prepared the groundwork for its acceptance by the Roman people.

There was one distinct culture that knew the Greeks most intimately – the Romans. The Romans had built a stable political and social order in central Italy while the Greeks were witnessing the decline of the city-state during the Hellenistic Age. The Romans resembled the Greeks in many respects with one important difference. The Romans successfully created the kind of cosmopolitan world order – the Empire – of which the Greeks had only dreamed.