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Philosophy

A. WORD AND MEANING   B. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS   C. PERIODS

A. WORD AND MEANING

Philosophy means 'love of wisdom' or 'desire for wisdom' (*philo-sophia*). The Greek noun φιλοσοφία (*philosophía*) and the verb φιλοσοφεῖν (*philosopheîn*) do not yet appear in Homer [1] and Hesiod (*c.* 700 BC), whereas σοφία (*sophía*) occasionally does appear. *Sophía* refers to any kind of technical ability, intellectual knowledge or political savvy as embodied e.g. by the → Seven Sages (Hdt. 1,29; 30; 60; 4,95). The term *philósophos* is first attested in Heraclitus (fr. 35 DK),

but → Plato [1] was the first who defined it – before Plato *philosophía* was synonymous with *philomathía*, 'love for knowledge' (Thuc. 2,40,1). Plato – according to some ancient sources → Pythagoras was first: Cic. Tusc. 5,3,4 – distinguished between *sophía* and *philosophía*: *sophía* is reserved for God alone (Pl. Phdr. 278d; Aristot. Metaph. 982b 17ff.). In antiquity, the term 'philosophy' had two basic meanings: 1) investigation of the heavenly phenomena, the cosmos (natural philosophy); according to many Greek philosophers its structure can be discovered only by pure thinking (see also → metaphysics); 2) thinking about man and the good life (→ Ethics).

B. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Greeks developed the Western concept of science, understood as the rigorous proof and substantiation of assumptions, as knowledge of the whole and as an activity that was an end in itself (Aristot. Protrepticus fr. 6; Plot. 3,8). Philosophy was based on frankness and freedom of inquiry and characterised by the basic principles of order (*kósmos*) and proportion or regularity (*lógos*), as also illustrated by contemporary sculpture and architecture. The *kósmos* was envisioned as a comprehensive, regular and purposeful order (→ Cosmology). The idea of the orderly cosmos was applied to human life and became its paradigm. Therefore the order of the cosmos became a model for the order of the state (*pólis*). By gradually moving away from the → myth of poets (or from religion) and from individual disciplines, the grasp and identity of Greek philosophy evolved. Philosophy and myth shared a world view (→ World). The goal of philosophy, however, was an understanding that was as rational and conceptual as possible (→ Rationality). The tension between ancient philosophy and poetry is mediated by the use of poetic literary genres (poem, aphorism, dialogue, etc., cf. → philosophical literature, genres of) by several philosophers (Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato, Lucretius etc.). Yet philosophy is different from the individual empirical disciplines. → Mathematics, a purely rational science, was the quintessential model of science (cf. → Pythagorean School, → Plato). First and foremost, philosophy tried to arrive at an understanding of unity from plurality (metaphysically, ethically and politically). For most Greek philosophers, investigating the *kósmos*, and being in general, was the highest and most distinguished facility of man. For this reason too, philosophy was ethics. In addition, by turning away from external values like money and honour, philosophy could involve a (more or less) ascetic way of life (→ Ascesis).

C. Periods

1. Beginnings 2. Classical Period (Socrates, Plato, Aristotles) 3. Hellenistic and Roman philosophy 4. Imperial Period and Late Antiquity

1. Beginnings

To some extent the onset of philosophy in Greece was predicated on earlier scientific achievements in Mesopotamia and Egypt, especially in → mathematics and → astronomy. Greek authors repeatedly expressed their admiration for the rich traditions of their predecessors, e.g. Herodotus and Plato (e.g. Hdt. 2,109; Pl. Leg. 819b). But the Greeks were the first for whom science and its pursuit was an end in itself that did not need to have any practical application. At first, philosophy was an investigation into the → nature (*phýsis*) of the whole, but from the 5th cent. BC on, it also – or exclusively so – was an investigation into the nature of man (*anthrōpínē phýsis*). The → Milesian School (Ionian natural philosophers) searched for the original matter or the → principle (*archḗ*) of all things. The ordering principle was conceived of as unchanging and divine (*theíon*) (→ Eleatic School: → Parmenides, → Zeno). Natural philosophy sometimes led to a criticism of → anthropomorphism in religion (→ Xenophanes and → Anaxagoras [2]), as happened later in the case of Plato. Materialist thought (→ Materialism), such as the → atomism of → Democritus [1] and its continuation (→ Epicurus, → Lucretius [III 1]) was to radicalize the criticism of religion. Later (especially in the Hellenistic and early Christian period) philosophy did not always reject poetic art; instead it embraced allegorical interpretation, searching for a deeper meaning behind the literal one (→ Allegoresis).

2. Classical Period (Socrates, Plato, Aristotles)

When the → Sophists (5th–4th cent. BC) for the first time defended a radical scepticism and conventionalism, → Socrates (470/65–399 BC) tried to rationally justify the old moral concepts. In his quest for virtue (*aretḗ*) and → happiness (*eudaimonía*) 'Socrates was the first who brought down philosophy from the heavens, placed it in cities and introduced it into families' (Cic. Tusc. 5,10). For Socrates knowledge was at the basis of a good and happy life. Language (*lógos*) became fundamental, more in particular a speaker's opinions (*lógoi*) to be examined in dialogue (Pl. Phd. 96a–99d). The dialectic method of disproof (*élenchos*) exposed false knowledge and conceit and thereby illustrated the long process of gaining philosophical knowledge. Among the Socratics were – in addition to Socrates' students → Xenophon and especially → Plato (whose works have survived) – the proponents of → Cynicism (→ Antisthenes [1], → Diogenes [14] of Sinope), the → Cyrenaics (→ Aristippus [3]) and the members of the → Megarian School (→ Euclides [2]). The Socratics emphasized various aspects – e.g. autarchy (→ *autárkeia*), → pleasure and → logic (or dialectics) – of the teaching

of Socrates, whose doctrine is very difficult to reconstruct because he never wrote anything down.

Plato emphasised the component *phílos* in *philosophía*/*philosopheîn* and thus defined philosophy not so much as 'wisdom' (*sophía*) but rather as the 'desire' for it (Pl. Phd. 61a; Plat. Grg. 484c). The philosopher does not love a part of wisdom but 'wisdom as a whole' (Pl. Resp. 475b; 580d-e). *Sophía* remains the goal although it can never be reached completely. As true comprehensive education (*paideía*), philosophy was for Plato the culmination of all arts and sciences. → Dialectics was supposed to lead to anhypothetical principles and purely noetic ideas (→ Ideas, theory of). In this way the good of man coincides with the metaphysically good. Philosophy was placed in sharp contrast to the → Sophists who degraded (pseudo-)knowledge to merely a means for self-representation. Turning away from sophistic relativism, Plato established the fundamental distinction between → opinion (*dóxa*) and knowledge (*epistḗmē*) (→ Epistemology). Plato's idealist political theory was based on the (as he acknowledged, unlikely) coincidence of political power and selfless knowledge (→ Political philosophy).

→ Isocrates, a student of → Gorgias [2], returned to the more general meaning of philosophy as *sophía*. Rejecting the idea that pure knowledge could ever be reached and was even relevant, he wanted to reconcile philosophy with politics and → rhetoric. Historically, not the Platonic concept but rather the Isocratic one influenced ancient → education. Plato's school, the Academy (→ *Akadḗmeia*), was a philosophical community with indirect political consequences (→ Philosophical life). After Plato's death, the mathematically oriented Old Academy (→ Speusippus, → Xenocrates) evolved, as well as the Middle (→ Arcesilaus [1]) and the New Academy (→ Carneades [1]). They represented various types of → scepticism.

→ Aristotle [6] rejected Plato's unitarian concept of knowledge and divided philosophy into theoretical philosophy (→ metaphysics, → mathematics, → physics) on the one hand and practical and 'productive' (poietic, *poiētikḗ*) philosophy (poetics, rhetoric, economy, politics, → aesthetics; → practical philosophy; → political philosophy) on the other. The various areas of knowledge or philosophies corresponded to the various types (*génē, eídē*, Lat. *genera*) of being (Aristot. Metaph. 1004a 4). Philosophy in the stricter, proper sense (metaphysics) examined only the most general and highest type, being itself (Aristot. Metaph. 1026a 20). Only the theoretical life gave man autarchy (Aristot. Eth. Nic. 1097b 10–11; 1172a 27–35). In general, Aristotle's (only partially preserved) writings revealed two basic tendencies: systematisation and specialisation. Philosophical speculation remained connected to empirical research (especially biology).

The Aristotelian school, the Lykeion (Lyceum), can only be traced to the 2nd cent. BC (→ Peripatos). The publication of a complete edition Aristotle's writings by → Andronicus [4] (*c.* 50 BC) was a new beginning and

the start of a new tradition of commentators on Aristotle (→ Aristotle, commentators on). → Neoplatonism brought a renewed interest in → Aristotelianism and absorbed it.

3. Hellenistic and Roman philosophy

The Hellenistic schools (after *c.* 300 BC) systematically divided philosophy into physics, ethics and logic. For them philosophy was primarily → ethics or moral philosophy (*ars vitae*, Cic. Fin. 2,2). The underlying ethical attitude was mostly based on physics, i.e. a world view (Sen. Epist. 89,7). The significance of the theoretical and the practical varied with each thinker. Plato, Aristotle and especially the character of Socrates provided an important frame of reference for → Stoicism. In general, the main interest of Hellenistic philosophy no longer was the order of the cosmos but the quest for → happiness. Philosophy provided a recourse against strokes of misfortune (Sen. Epist. 104,21–24) and provided spiritual guidance (Epict. Dissertationes 3,3; 13; 15; M. Aur. 2,17). Inner tranquility (→ *ataraxía*, *apátheia*, Lat. *tranquillitas animi*) could be attained through spiritual exercises. The objectives were to reduce one's needs, carried to an extreme by the Cynics (→ Cynicism), and to master passion and the desire for external things. The practical outlook produced various kinds of → popular philosophy. → Zeno of Cition (333/2–262 BC) and the Old Stoa developed → logic and a linguistic concept. Individual sciences flourished as well, such as → mathematics and → astronomy. The Middle Stoa (→ Panaetius and → Poseidonius) changed this outlook; this included a relaxing of the moral rigor and epistemological optimism (Cic. Fin. 4,79). After 167 BC, Stoic philosophy was introduced to political circles in Rome (the → Scipionic circle). → Cicero largely accepted the Isocratic concept of philosophy as general education (→ *enkýklios paideía*) and formulated the distinctively Roman concept of → *humanitas*.

→ Epicurus (342/1–271/70 BC) founded another philosophical school with a moral orientation based on Democritus' atomism and the hedonism of the Cyrenaics. He examined what was within human power and what was outside of it, thus determining the framework of freedom and responsibility (Diog. Laert. 10,133–134). By his apolitical attitude Epicurus distanced himself from the Stoa (Diog. Laert. 10,130ff.; in that sense Lucretius' [III 1] adoption of the Epicurean position was an exception in the politically oriented intellectual life in Rome). He continued to accept the immutability of being, yet he rejected the absolute determinism of the Stoa. The Sceptics (→ Pyrrho of Elis, *c.* 360–271 BC, later → Sextus Empiricus, *c.* AD 200) – like the Sophists and the Middle Academy – rejected any possibility of knowledge (Diog. Laert. 9,61 and 74–76; Sext. Emp. Adv. Math. 11,140). Their agnosticism lead them to accept the customs of society, and it assisted them in the search for serenity (*ataraxía*).

There are a few accounts of women who were philosophically active. These are not very informative, and it is increasingly realised today that they need and deserve reconstruction (→ Women philosophers).   F.R.

4. Imperial Period and Late Antiquity

In Late Antiquity there was a philosophical shift from the practical to the religious and metaphysical. The period (AD 1st to 4th cent.) culminated in → Neoplatonism (→ Plotinus, → Porphyrius, → Proclus) with its strongly theological reading of Platonic texts; the goal was to become one with the ineffable One (Plot. Enn. 6,7,35; 5,9,10). Yet, the mystical element was based on strictly rational exercises. Contemplating the world that was thought of as divine, unchangeable and eternal involved ethics, since the divine order needed to be realised by imitation. Plotinus' criticism of the pessimist world view of the gnostics (→ Gnosis) belonged in the same context. The imitation of God, according to the words of Plato (Pl. Tht. 176b), became the primary aim of philosophy.

After initial opposition against Greek and Roman philosophy (e.g → Tertullianus), from the 2nd cent. AD on most Christian thinkers (→ Clemens [3] of Alexandria, → Origenes, → Hieronymus, → Augustine) sought a common basis for philosophy and Christian revelation. For instance, Augustine considered philosophical reason (*ratio*) and Christian belief (*fides*) as different, yet interrelated ways of looking at the world and attaining knowledge of God; although belief had precedence. Elements of Platonist and Neoplatonist theology and Stoic ethics were integrated into the emerging Christian world view. Important traits of the common basis were the separability of the soul from the earthly world (in spite of the affirmation of physicality because of incarnation) and the self-sufficiency of God. Christian doctrine, however, denied human autarchy because of the dependence on Christ's act of salvation. In addition, the new idea of creation required a rejection of the Greek thesis of the eternity of the world (e.g. in Aristotle) (→ Philoponus). The study of Hellenistic philosophy inevitably lead to an adoption of philosophical and theological concepts which in turn helped to clarify e.g. problems related to the definition of trinity and incarnation. → Boethius (*c.* AD 430–524), as translator of the Aristotelian logic, – just as Cicero before him – became a crucial mediator between Greek and Latin intellectual life and between antiquity and the Middle Ages in general.

The later reception and transmission of Greek texts in the Latin Middle Ages through the Arabs (9th to 12th cent.) is also highly important; it made possible the rediscovery of Aristotle's writings in the 13th cent. Philosophy, in particular Aristotelian metaphysics and logic, became part of the seven liberal arts (→ *artes liberales*).

→ Philosophy

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F.R.

Philosophy, teaching of

A. Institutional aspects   B. Teaching methods   C. Subject matter

A. Institutional aspects

→ Plato probably modelled his school, the → Academy (*Akadēmeía*) – named after the gymnasium in which instruction was held – after the Pythagorean communities (Pl. Resp. 10,600b; → Pythagorean School). In turn, his institution served as a model for later philosophical schools, which (unlike the → Sophists, whose groups of pupils met at a variety of locations for brief periods of time) continued to exist in Athens for centuries: the Lyceum (→ Peripatos) founded by Aristotle (→ Aristoteles [6]) and → Theophrastus, the Stoa (→ Stoicism) that was founded by → Zeno [2] of Citium, and the 'garden' (*kḗpos*) of → Epicurus. The testaments of school leaders (Diog. Laert. 3,41; 5,11; 5,51; 5,61; 10,14; 10,69) indicate that the schools' possessions (library, land) were the property of the head of the school, who was chosen by members of the school or by his predecessor [1. 106–134; 2. 226ff.]. In legal terms, therefore, each school was identified with the person who was head of the school; this refutes the earlier belief [3. 262–291] that philosophical schools were required for legal reasons to take the status of religious communities. Instruction was held in multipurpose buildings (such as the gymnasiums known as the *Akadēmeía* and *Lykeíon)*, or, in the case of Zeno, in a public columned hall, the *Stoá poikílē* (→ Stoa). Only Epicurus had a garden with a house where he taught and lived in community with his pupils (Diog. Laert. 10,17f.).

Unlike the Pythagorean communities, these schools were open to a wider public, for the most part male and free-born. Only two women, → Axiothea and Lastheneia, are known to have been pupils of Plato and → Speusippus (Diog. Laert. 4,2). Epicurus accepted not only slaves (Diog. Laert. 10,2; 10,10), but also married women and former hetaerae as his pupils [4. § 24, p. 287]. We find no information from the Stoics regarding female pupils, although C. → Musonius [1] Rufus favoured philosophical instruction for women; certainly the freedman → Epictetus [2] was his pupil while still a slave. The Stoic L. Annaeus → Cornutus [4] was also a freedman. Among the Neoplatonic philosophers whose names are known today was → Hypatia (for information on female pupils of various philosophical schools, see also → Women philosophers). The Cynics and the Pyrrhonean Sceptics did not establish schools of their own (→ Cynicism; → Pyrrho; → Scepticism).

Most philosophers did not charge fees. The school of Epicurus was supported by donations from benefactors and modest contributions from its members. In general, the pupils were divided into two groups, those who were merely listeners and those who belonged to the inner circle of confidants, friends and companions (*hetaíroi, gnṓrimoi, synḗtheis*, Latin *iunctiores*), some of whom were treated as colleagues by the leaders of the