



PHI 105

Ancient Philosophy

Course Manual

Omotade Adegbindin Ph.D

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General Editor: Prof. Bayo Okunade

Page layout, instructional design and development by Ogungbure Adebayo

University of Ibadan,
Nigeria

Telex: 31128NG

Tel: +234 (80775935727)

E-mail: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng

Website: www.dlc.ui.edu.ng

Vice-Chancellor's Message

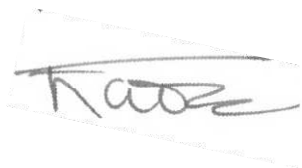
The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, iPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfillment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Isaac Adewole

Vice-Chancellor

Foreword

As part of its vision of providing education for “Liberty and Development” for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

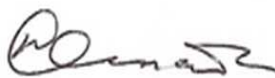
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre’s provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bayo Okunade', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Bayo Okunade

Director

Course Development Team

Content Authoring

Omotade Adegbindin Ph.D

Content Editor

Prof. Remi Raji-Oyelade

Production Editor

Dr. Gloria O. Adedoja

Learning Design & Technologist

Ogungbure Adebayo

Managing Editor

Ogunmefun Oladele Abiodun

General Editor

Prof. Bayo Okunade

General Introduction and Course Objectives

This course “Ancient Philosophy” refers primarily to Western philosophy from its beginnings among the Greeks on the Ionian coast of Asia Minor to its last manifestation in the philosophical teachings of Plotinus.

Philosophy began with man’s sense of awe, and his curiosity to learn more about his environment and the origins of all things around him. On record, the birthplace of philosophy around sixth century B.C. was a town called Miletus, in Asia Minor, Greece. Before the birth of philosophy in this town, people used to explain the origin of things around them by saying that everything that they know was created by the gods. The desire to know led men to philosophize and they did so when they began to penetrate into the deeper nature of things and to seek by reason the most basic causes of what they knew by experience. Thus, an individual develops a philosophical spirit the moment he learns to look at the world in a new way by becoming self-conscious and critical and avoiding mythological explanations in the attempt to explain the origins of all things.

From its origin onwards, philosophical thinking has developed characteristics which makes it different in some ways from mythical thinking. Let us summarise these characteristics thus:

1. Philosophers like to take a distance from traditional beliefs or opinions, not to reject them all, but to examine them critically by means of reason and its arguments;
2. Human reason therefore gains a certain autonomy which allows the individual to make personal enquiry into all kinds of areas of knowledge such as natural phenomena, moral behaviour, religious attitudes and beliefs, and so on.

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Unit 1 The First Greek Philosophers

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you will learn about the lives and beliefs of the first Greek philosophers, also known as the Milesian philosophers. These philosophers are Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes. These early Greek thinkers were curious about and impressed by the fact of change: birth and growth, death and decay, and so on within the universe.

So they believed that there should be something permanent in spite of all the change and transition they observed around them. This is to say that these philosophers tried to explain the origin of all things by looking for something which is primary to this process of change.

What then do we hope to achieve through our discussion on the first Greek philosophers?

Learning Outcomes for Unit 1

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 Describe the first Greek philosophers' notion of primary substance printed in **bold** (SAQ 1.1, 1.2, 1.3)
- 1.2 State the primary concern of the first Greek philosophers (SAQ 1.4)
- 1.3 State why Anaximander and Anaximenes disagrees with Thales (SAQ 1.5)

1.1 The First Greek Philosophers (Thales, Anaximander & Anaximenes)

1.1.1. Thales

Thales was a native of Miletus in Asia Minor, a flourishing commercial city, and lived between 624 and 547 B.C. He had a practical mind because he distanced himself from mythologies and questioned most of the mythological explanations that were popular in his days. He is said to have mastered the mathematical and astronomical knowledge which gave him the opportunity to solve a number of engineering problems for the military and invent navigational instruments and techniques. But some historians of philosophy believe that Thales learnt his knowledge of mathematics and astronomy from some gifted Egyptians and Babylonians; these historians make this claim because Miletus had some cultural relations with Egypt and Babylon at the time.

Thales is said to have introduced the science of geometry to the Greeks which was the result of the economic relations between Egypt and Greek mercenaries during the 6th and 7th century. It must be added that during these centuries, the first Greek settlement in Egypt was occupied by a Milesian garrison which allowed the Egyptians and the Greeks to interact freely on many issues. It was not Thales' mathematical

and technological achievements that earned him his place as the first Greek philosopher, but his quest for the ultimate nature of all things, the unity that underlies all the multiplicity of things in our experience.



Fig. 1.1 Thales © Google Images

It is important to note that the first Greek philosophers were mainly concerned with deciding what the primary element of all things is. Thales was therefore the first Greek to search for the primary substance from which all things are derived. According to Thales, the source of all things that exist is **water**. In other words, he believed that water is the primary substance or element of all things that exist.

- It is generally believed that water is one of the most important nutrients in life as no human being or living thing can survive without water. Now, Thales is of the view that water is the primary source from which all things were made. Do you think it is the essentiality of water to life that made Thales conclude that water is the primary constituent of reality?
- Apart from the fact of water's essentiality to life, Thales by preoccupation was a sailor; so he spent most of his life navigating the waters. It is probably due to this reason that he concluded that water is the primal existence, especially as most part of the earth's geography is occupied by water.

At first, the position of Thales concerning the ultimate source of all things may appear naïve and improbable. However, Thales probably came to the conclusion that water is the source of all things because water is essential to life. Additional reasons may have occurred to Thales to support his conclusion that water is the fundamental element of all things. For example, liquid water can be transformed into a gas (steam), and it also can be changed into a solid (ice). Furthermore, water comes from the air in the form of rain and returns back to the air as mist. When water evaporates from a dish, it

leaves sediment (apparently turning into earth), while digging down into the earth will yield to us water. Also, living in Miletus and being surrounded by water may have made it seem probable to Thales that everything comes from water.

1.1.2 Anaximander

Anaximander was another Greek philosopher who is generally considered by many to be a disciple of Thales. He flourished between 610 – 545 B.C. and, like Thales, lived in Miletus. Just like Thales, he wanted to answer the question concerning the ultimate source of all things that exist. However, Anaximander concluded that the stuff of which all things were made wasn't water as Thales made us to believe. Since he disagreed with Thales on the ultimate source of all things, he attempted to provide an explanation on the nature of the primary element from which all things were made by asking the question: what is the cause of all things? According to him, all things arise out of a substance he referred to as the **Apeiron**. He believes Apeiron is the cause of all things and it is "boundless, unlimited, eternal and indestructible, infinite and ageless. He considers the Apeiron as the reservoir of properties from which all things arise and return according to the law of natural justice.



Fig 1.2 Anaximander: © Adapted from N.S. Gill's Anaximander <http://ancienthistory.about.com/>

In other words, Anaximander was of the opinion that the ultimate reality must be an eternal, imperishable source from which all things are made and to which all things return. Anaximander was full of scientific curiosity and was known to have said that the sun is as large as the earth. In this regard, he was the first to

introduce the gnomon sundial (an instrument that shows the time of day by the shadow of a pointer on a cylindrical surface) in Greece. He is also believed to be the first to draw a map of the world.

1.2 Anaximander's Disagreement with Thales

According to Anaximander, it is mistaken to agree with Thales and say that the ultimate source of all things is water. He explained the error in Thales' position by asking the question: If the earth rests on water as Thales made us to believe, what did the water rest on? From this explanation, we can also say that Anaximander was the first philosopher to criticize another philosopher.

His disagreement with Thales is further made clear by the fact that Anaximander qualified the source of all things as "boundless, limitless, imperishable, infinite, eternal and ageless" because he believed that water is just another particular thing or element that we find in the world along with earth, air and fire. His argument is simply that if any of the known elements like water, air, fire, earth, were to be the primal substance of which all things were made, then it would have absorbed and conquered the other known elements. For instance, if water were to be the primal substance as Thales argued, then there could never be heat or fire because water destroys rather than generate fire. This is to say that Anaximander held the opinion that the primal substance out of which everything else (in all its variety) is made should be something that is imperishable.

1.3 Anaximenes

Anaximenes was the last of the Milesian philosophers and probably a pupil of Anaximander. His date of birth is uncertain but he flourished around 494 B.C. Like Thales and Anaximander, Anaximenes was concerned primarily with the basic substances that could serve the foundation of all things or reality. Though he agreed with Anaximander that the basic substances or reality must be eternal, Anaximenes believed that Anaximander's answer to the question of the ultimate source of all things was inadequate. He believed that Anaximander's answer or position is vague and looked for a more convincing answer to the question. For Anaximenes, the primary substance from which all things were made is **Air**, affirming that all things evolve from air and return to it.

According to Anaximenes, air is eternal, infinite and mobile. Several observations could have motivated Anaximenes to argue that air is the basic reality or the ultimate source of all things. For instance, air is much more pervasive than water; air is central to all nature since it is necessary for the existence of fire and can be found in water and in the earth. Anaximenes probably observed also that water falls when not supported, while air is self-supporting. This answers why he rejected Thales' claim that water is the basic reality. According to him, water cannot support the earth because it cannot support itself, only air can support itself and can conceivably support the heavenly bodies as well. In other words, when air concentrates, it first forms a cloud, then water and lastly earth and rocks; when it rarefies it turns into fire. Thus, Anaximenes originated the doctrine that the primary substance which is air produces all others either by being rarefied into fire or condensed into wind, cloud, water, earth and rock. Anaximenes further believed that the earth is shaped like a disc or a round table and that air is the common medium of the endless worlds of the universe.



Fig 1.3 Anaximenes © Google Images

Activity 1.3

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Based on your learning experience, and knowing that the first Greek philosophers postulated different substance as the primary stuff from which all things were made, note the name of each substance postulated by first Greek thinkers.

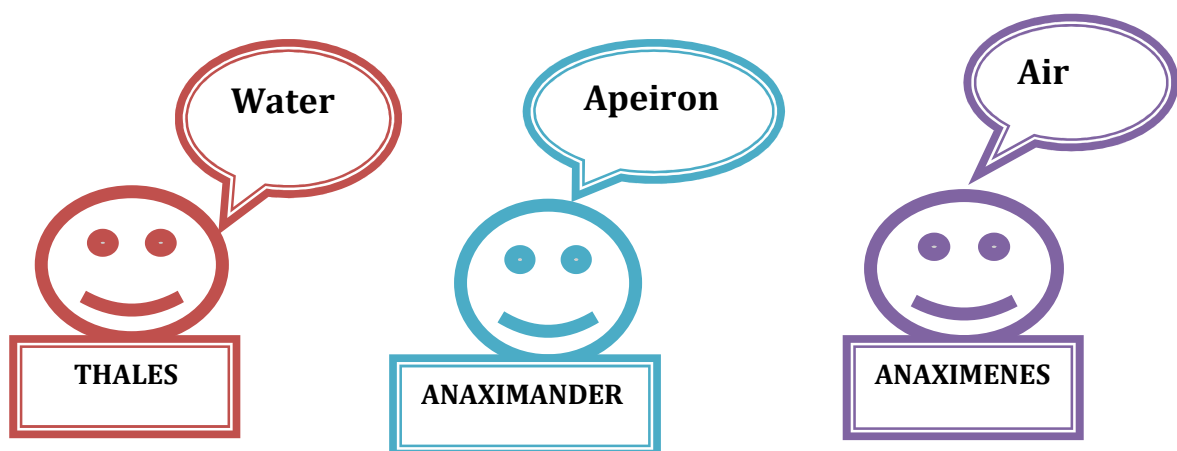


Fig 1.4

Activity 1.3 Feedback:

Take a look at figure 1.4; it describes the various primary elements which the first Greek philosopher says is the basic constituent of reality.

Box1.1: First Greek Philosophers

The history of philosophy, especially in the Western tradition is often traced to the life and times of the first Greek philosophers. However, it is important to note that:

- Curiosity was what propelled the first Greek philosophers to discover the primary substance from

Summary of Unit 1

In Unit 1, you have learned that:

1. The first Greek philosophers are also known as the Milesians.
2. The basic concern of the first Greek philosophers was to describe the primary substance from which all things were made.
3. Thales concluded that Water is the primary substance from which all things were made.
4. Anaximander is of the view that it is Apeiron, while Anaximenes affirms that Air is the basic constituent of reality.
5. The three philosophers differed on the details concerning the origin of all things.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 1

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 1.1 (tests learning outcome 1.1)

What did Thales regard as the primary substance from which all things were made?

SAQ 1.2 (tests learning outcome 1.2)

What is the term used by Anaximander to refer to the primary substance?

SAQ 1.3 (tests learning outcome 1.3)

If Thales says that the primary substance consists in *Water*, Anaximander says it is *Apeiron*, what is Anaximenes own notion of the primary substance of reality?

SAQ 1.4 (tests learning outcome 1.4)

How would you describe the main concern of the first Greek philosophers?

SAQ 1.5 (tests learning outcome 1.5)

Can you describe the *main error* Anaximander pointed out in Thales' position?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 1

SAQ 1.1: According to Thales, the primary substance is water.

SAQ 1.2: He used the term *Aperion*

SAQ 1.3: Answer: Anaximenes holds that the primary substance is *Air*.

SAQ 1.4: They were concerned with finding out the primary substance from which all things were made.

SAQ 1.5: Anaximander believes that water cannot be primary constituent of the earth because if the earth rests on water as Thales made us to believe, we do not know what water rest on?

Unit 2 The Pythagoreans

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you will learn about the Pythagoreans who formed the first philosophic group that emerged after the three Milesian philosophers discussed in unit one. However, unlike the Milesians who seem to detach themselves completely from mythological explanations, the Pythagoreans believed that philosophers should not disregard myth as sheer nonsense, that philosophy and myth should not be separated at all. But their contribution to the development of mathematics and astronomy gives them a place in the history of philosophy.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 2

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 State the difference between the Milesians and the Pythagorean philosophical systems (SAQ 2.1).
- 2.2 State the two fields of inquiry that the Pythagoreans greatly contributed to (SAQ 2.2).
- 2.3 Describe the importance of numbers in Pythagorean philosophy (SAQ 2.3).
- 2.4 Describe the importance of music in Pythagorean philosophy (SAQ 2.4).

2.1 The Pythagoreans

2.1.1 About Pythagoras

Pythagoras was the founder of the Pythagorean School and his philosophy is popularly known as Pythagoreanism. Pythagoras was a native of Samos, a commercial rival of Miletus, a Greek island in the Aegean. His date of birth is not recorded, but his active philosophical life is usually dated from 525 to 500 B.C. It is said that Pythagoras left Samos because he wasn't happy about how Polycrates, the ruler of Samos at the time, was governing his people. After leaving Samos, Pythagoras visited Egypt where he learnt much of his wisdom. He again left Egypt and later settled down in Croton in Southern Italy where his reputation as the founder of a religious and scientific society became popular. The religious community founded by Pythagoras was open to both men and women. Many of Pythagoras' followers believed that he was divine. For this reason, it is hard to separate his thoughts from those of his followers, since they tended to attribute all their ideas to their founder.

It is generally thought that Pythagoras didn't produce any books concerning his religious and scientific teachings; instead, he passed on his teachings orally and implored his followers to keep most of their teachings and practices secret.

2.2 Pythagorean Philosophy

Unlike the Milesians, the Pythagoreans believed that philosophy was more than scientific curiosity. They believed that mysticism is an important part of philosophy and that is why they combined the Greek scientific spirit with religious mysticism. Their religious community, therefore, served as a school of mathematics and a religious order.

For the Pythagoreans, the visible world is false and illusive. They believed in the existence of gods and semi-gods. According to them, the goal of religion was purification, and the goal of purification was the salvation of one's soul. They believed that the soul was immortal and that after death it migrates into another body, possibly an animal's body. In this way, the soul is condemned to a cycle of reincarnation from which it may escape by attaining a state of purity. In other words, the only way to achieve release from this "wheel of birth" and the prison of the body was to purify the soul. The Pythagoreans did this through various purification rites which made them to observe a strict living without pleasures. For religious reason, too, they observed many taboos and restrictions in their diet. Most of these taboos and rules are strange that one wonders the basis for them. It is said that Pythagoras taught his disciples well on the purifications of the soul. According to Pythagoras, the soul can achieve purity through an intellectual process of obtaining philosophical wisdom. In fact, Pythagoras is believed to be the first to call himself a "philosopher" which literally means "a lover of wisdom". He believed that the only way to live the right way of life is to harmonize ourselves with the universe, meaning that we should learn to understand the universe we live in.

Activity 2.1

Take a look at figure 2.1; it describes the Pythagoreans teachings on the purification of the soul and the cycle of reincarnation. Now, if you examine this figure (2.1) below critically, you will see what goal the Pythagoreans aim to achieve with this doctrine on the reincarnation of the human soul and how it enters into other bodies e.g. the body of an animal. This clearly shows the doctrine of immortality/reincarnation in Pythagorean philosophy.

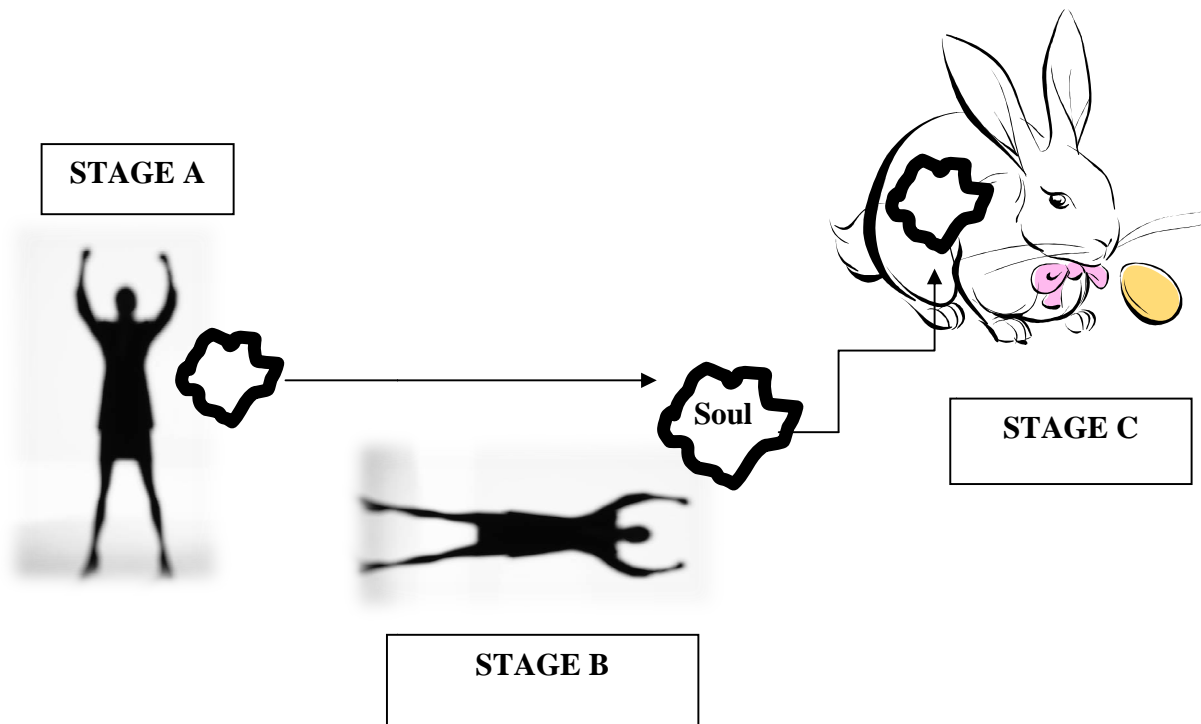


Fig 2.1

Activity 2.1 Feedback:

In figure 2.1 above, follow the arrow links for better illustration: Stage A is the normal life-situation where man lives with his soul; Stage B is the state of death where the soul lives the body because it is believed the soul is immortal; Stage C show the State after death where the soul of a man can

2.3 Pythagorean Contribution to the Development of Mathematics and Astronomy

The Pythagoreans achieved so much in the field of mathematics. The Pythagoreans believed that numbers and geometrical figures are divine. Their teachings showed that there was an order and unity in the cosmos (an ordered universe) and that it was mathematical in nature. For them, numbers lie at the base of reality and this is why the saying “all things are numbers” is attributed to them.

To further stress their point that philosophy can’t be separated from mysticism, the Pythagoreans mixed mathematics and myth to explain the evolution or gradual development of the world. In explaining the evolution of the worlds, the Pythagoreans maintained that the cosmos was once a perfect figure before it “breathed” and allowed “chaos” to enter it and to break down its compact unity into an indefinite amount of pieces. Each of these pieces was a

quantity or number that must be brought together in order to return the cosmos back to its original (perfect) form. The Pythagoreans, therefore, believed that the purpose of philosophy, mathematics and religion was to overcome this confusion and to return the world to perfect unity once more. The greatest mathematical discovery credited to Pythagoras or to his immediate disciples is the 'Pythagoras Theorem' which says that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides or that the sum of the squares adjoining the right angle in a right-angled triangle is equal to the square on the remaining side, the hypotenuse.

In astronomy, the Pythagorean analysis of the movements of the sun, moon and stars into circular motions drew the attention of many scientists until the 17th century when Johannes Kepler, a German astronomer, formulated his first two laws of motion which recognized the elliptical orbits of the planets about the sun.

Music is also central to the Pythagorean philosophy. In fact, the Pythagoreans believed that the numerical ratios which underlie the musical scale can be used to explain the mathematical nature of the universe. They discovered that the differences between musical tones are functions of exact numerical ratios. For example, when a string of the musical instrument is doubled in length, the sound it makes is an octave lower. Two strings whose lengths are in a ratio of 4 to 3 make sounds four notes apart. Lengths in the ratio of 3 to 2 produce sounds a fifth apart. From this, the Pythagoreans argued that numbers are the basics of music from which the theory of harmony is derived. The theory of harmony in music simply says that a pleasant sound results from disparate tones which are kept in accord by their disposition in proper ratios. The Pythagoreans used this theory of harmony to say that, if numbers are the basis of music, then they are the basis of everything else.

Box 2.1 The Essentials of Pythagorean Philosophy

Pythagorean philosophy is both a mix of natural philosophy and religious philosophy owing to its thematic emphasis.

It is important to note that

- The Pythagoreans discovered that there was order in the universe as opposed to chaos.
- They strongly maintained that all things were numbers and it is this number that was responsible for the order within the universe.
- The doctrine of reincarnation of the soul is also a cardinal feature of Pythagorean philosophy.

Summary of Unit 2

In Unit 2, you have learned that:

1. The Pythagoreans' early philosophical engagements which led to the development of mathematics and astronomy gives them a place in the history of philosophy.
2. The Pythagoreans held that the goal of any religion should be towards achieving the purification of the human soul.
3. One needs a mix of mythical and mathematical thinking to discover the principles evolution behind the universe
4. Pythagoras is probably the first person to call himself a "philosopher" which literally means "a lover of wisdom".
5. Music is also an essential part of philosophical expression such that it helps the Pythagoreans in explaining the reason for order within the universe.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 2

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 2.1 (tests learning outcome 2.1)

In what way are the Milesians different from the Pythagoreans in their philosophical speculation?

SAQ 2.1 (tests learning outcome 2.2)

What are the fields of human inquiry whose development can be traced to the Pythagoreans?

SAQ 2.3 (tests learning outcome 2.3)

2.3 Reality for the Pythagoreans consists in what?

SAQ 2.4 (tests learning outcome 2.4)

2.4 According to the Pythagoreans, what can we use to explain the mathematical nature of the universe?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 2

SAQ 2.1:The difference between them is that the Milesians believe that mythology should not be part of philosophy but the Pythagoreans holds that mythology should be seen as essential to philosophical thinking.

SAQ 2.2:Mathematics and Astronomy

SAQ 2.3:Numbers

SAQ 2.4:Music

Unit 3 Xenophanes of Colophon

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

This study, you will learn about the philosophical thoughts of another great philosopher known as Xenophanes. Xenophanes was a philosophically minded-poet who lived all his life committed to theology, poetry, social and religious issues. His philosophical system was quite distinct from those of his contemporaries which make him stand out among his contemporaries. He was also reported to possess a sharp but critical mind which he used in fashioning out his philosophical thoughts.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 3

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 3.1 State why Xenophanes is regarded a monotheist (SAQ 3.1)
- 3.2 Describe the reason why Xenophanes is regarded as “the destroyer of myth” (SAQ 3.2)
- 3.3 Describe the philosophy of Xenophanes (SAQs 3.3, 3.4, 3.5).

3.1 About Xenophanes

3.1.1 The Life and Times of Xenophanes

Xenophanes was born in Colophon which was not far from Miletus. His exact dates are not known but historians have put the time he lived around 570 to 478 B.C. What is clear about the time he lived is that he was a philosopher that came after Pythagoras and before Heraclitus.

Xenophanes fled from Italy around 546 B.C due to the invasion of Ionia by the Persians and this made him to travel so extensively. As he travelled about, he supported himself with the money or gifts he made by reciting his own poetry in public and by speaking at banquets. In other words, he moved about making his living as a composer, reciter of poetry and master of ceremonies in aristocratic houses.

3.2. Xenophanes’ view on Religion

Xenophanes was renowned for his criticism against the ways the earliest poets had presented the Greek gods. The earliest poets, like Homer and Hesiod, had given the impression that the Greek gods behaved like men and sometimes engaged themselves in activities of men, like adultery, deception, robbery, and so on. Xenophanes attacked these claims by such poets as Homer and Hesiod and argued that the Greek idea of gods came from the way the Greeks perceived the world around them. He pointed out that a true god needn't be like man; if gods be like men, then different people would see god or gods differently. That is why he said that if lions or oxen could paint with their hands, lions would paint god as lion and oxen as ox. He believed that this will lead to having as many gods as there are many people (races). He therefore believed in the existence of a single god who is the greatest among gods and men. Xenophanes held a conception of god who does not think the same way as men and is in control of everything without moving from side to side. This god is divine and immovable and yet can move anything by the force of his spirit.

Xenophanes has been called the “destroyer of myths”, because he criticized the theological myths that were popular among the Greeks of his time. He is perhaps regarded as a philosopher to reckon with due to his rational theology which we have discussed above. Xenophanes also believed that wise men or people with great wisdom (philosophers) should be respected in society far more than any group or set of men. For instance, he explained that wisdom is superior to brute force or physical skill and that societies shouldn't praise or commend people who win games, races, and so on. For him, these people (athletes) have only demonstrated physical skill which is inferior to wisdom.

Activity 3.1:

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Look at the figure 3.1. It is simply a reflection of some of the facts that made Xenophanes to reject the philosophical systems of Homer and Hesoid as a religious philosophy that unduly glorified the gods.

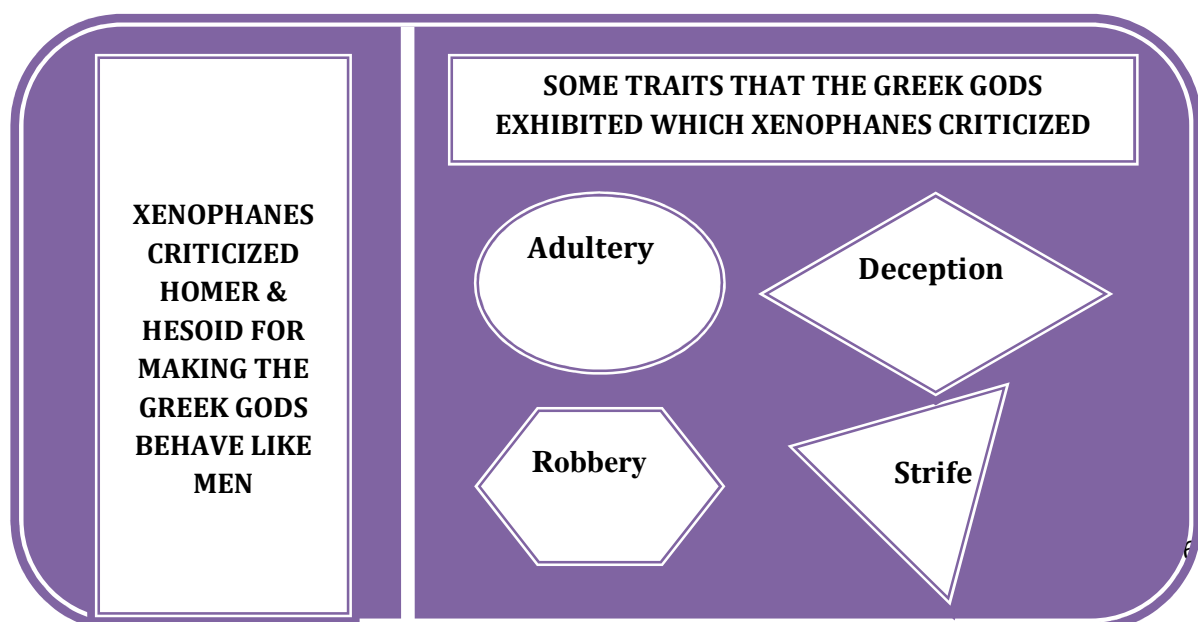


Fig 3.1

Activity 3.1 Feedback:

Take a critical look at figure 3.2 above; do you think it quite justifies Xenophanes' argument that if oxen were gods, they will make gods that look like themselves?

3.2.1 Xenophanes' view on Knowledge

Xenophanes' contribution to the nature of knowledge is also very important. In fact, some scholars have argued that what we call epistemology (a branch of philosophy dealing with how we acquire knowledge) actually started with Xenophanes. He is therefore said to be the first philosopher to make important remark about the nature of knowledge. He once said that if God hadn't made yellow honey, men would think that figs were much sweeter. Here, Xenophanes is pointing out that sense perception is relative. Therefore, what we consider sweet or heavy or tall may depend on our experience of what is contrast with it. He went further to show a distinction between knowledge and opinion, According to him, men can't have a perfect knowledge of things, but they can achieve a close approximation of truth through careful investigation.

Box 3.1 Xenophanes' view on Knowledge

In the philosophy of Xenophanes, the notion of criticism essentially featured. But such criticism is directed at mythical thinking.

It is, however, important to note that:

- Xenophanes was focused on Religion and Human Knowledge
- The understanding of the existence of God offered by Xenophanes is monotheistic.
- Xenophanes pointed out that perception is relative by distinguishing between knowledge and opinion.

Summary of Unit 3

In Unit 3, you have learned that:

1. Xenophanes, though a poet and an orator, made significant contributions to the discourse of philosophy
2. Xenophanes attacked the claims by such poets as Homer and Hesiod on the nature of the gods and argued that the Greek idea of gods came from the way the Greeks perceived the world around them.
3. Xenophanes claims that perception is relative because people observe and view the world differently.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 3

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 3.1 (tests learning outcome 3.1)

In what way can we describe Xenophanes as a Monotheist?

SAQ 3.2 (tests learning outcome 3.2)

Why is Xenophanes regarded as the “destroyer of myths”?

SAQ 3.3 (tests learning outcome 3.3)

Why did Xenophanes insist that philosophers must be respected within the society?

SAQ 3.4 (tests learning outcome 3.4)

What branch of philosophy is often credited to have started with Xenophanes?

SAQ 3.1 (tests learning outcome 3.5)

What are the two things Xenophanes made a distinction between in his epistemology?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 1

SAQ 3.1: He the existence of a single god who is the greatest among gods and men.

SAQ 3.2: He criticized the theological myths that were popular among the Greeks of his time.

SAQ 3.3: He holds such a view because philosophers are known to be wise men with great wisdom that the society needs for development.

SAQ 3.4: Epistemology

SAQ 3.5: Knowledge and Opinion

Unit 4 Heraclitus of Ephesus

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

This study is designed to explain the philosophical ideas of Heraclitus, a native of the Ionian city of Ephesus in Asia Minor who lived within the sixth and fifth centuries. He was born into a noble family and had the opportunity to rule Ephesus if he wanted. Instead, he renounced all political and priestly opportunities that his status as a noble man offered him and dedicated himself to philosophy. His interest in philosophy is not surprising: his royal descent gave him the opportunity to be familiar with the philosophical views of the Milesians and the Pythagoreans.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 4

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 4.1 State the central focus of Heraclitus philosophy (SAQ 4.1, 4.3)
- 4.2 Describe what Heraclitus means by the term “Logos” (SAQ 4.2)
- 4.3 Describe the doctrine of change in Heraclitus philosophy (SAQ 4.3, 4.4)
- 4.4 State what Heraclitus considers as the primal substance. (SAQ 4.4)

4.1 The ‘Logos’ in Heraclitus’ Philosophy

Heraclitus is generally referred to as a difficult philosopher to interpret because his philosophical views were always conveyed in paradoxes and aphorisms; he deliberately chose not to develop a continuous line of argument in order to make people accept his views. In fact, this is a major reason why he was variously called “the Dark One”, “the Obscure”, “the Riddler”.

Heraclitus believed that wisdom is the goal of philosophy and also believed that philosophers should not rely on the views of others, that it is un-philosophical to do so. For instance, he is said to have accused Pythagoras of relying upon the views or authority of others rather than on his own intellectual productivity which could have earned him his own brand of wisdom or philosophy. He also believed that the philosophers should always distinguish themselves and obscure their understanding of the cosmos as much as possible in order to remain unknown by or incomprehensible to the uneducated masses. Although Heraclitus expressed his ideas in somewhat obscure ways – which do not conform to the philosophical ideal of clarity – he represents an interesting stage in the history of philosophy.

He explained that we can’t obtain wisdom through factual information, but by seeing the hidden meaning behind the appearances. He believed that the world or reality comes to us in the form of a riddle and that this riddle can only be translated (correctly) by understanding the

“Logos “. The Greek word “Logos” means “reason” or “the rational content of what is spoken”. According to him, people should be able to interpret the world in the same way since there is only one truth. For example, Heraclitus believed that if we are all rational and calculate $3+4$, we should all get the same answer. He therefore believed that only a company of fools would come up with different answers.

Take a look at fig 4.1 it describes the idea of Heraclitus concerning the “Logos”.

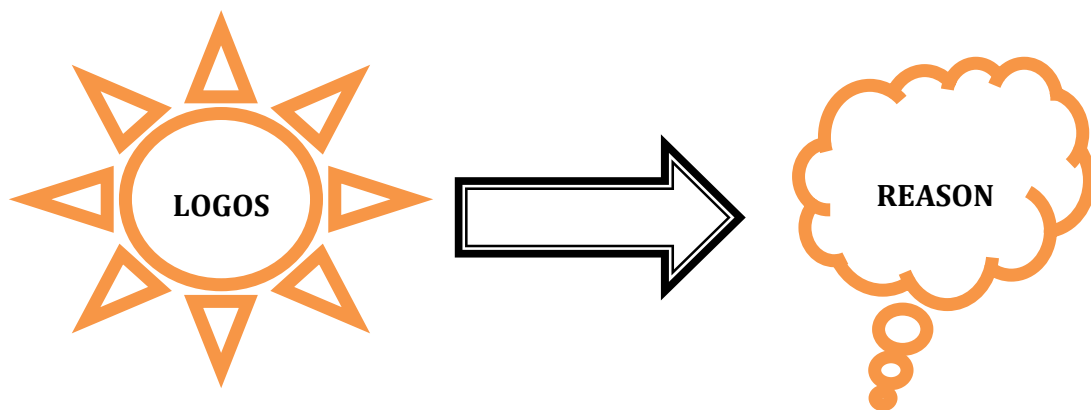


Fig 4.1 showing the meaning of the term “logos” in Heraclitus’ Philosophy

4.2 The Doctrine of Change in Heraclitus’ Philosophy

He is mostly remembered for his philosophical view on the primacy of change. He argued that change is ultimate and that most of our experience of stability and permanence are merely how things appear to be. Thus, he regarded fire as the primary substance while speaking in the same sort of way that Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes had talked about water, “boundless” and air respectively. He held that fire was the prime material in nature and that all things originated from fire which was capable of change and motion. According to him, “change is the only permanent thing”. He therefore regarded the universe as a ceaseless changing conflict of opposites, all things being in a state of flux, always coming into being and passing away. He believed that the world was created out of a process of change and will be eternally living fire, “regularly becoming ignited and regularly becoming extinguished.”

There is no doubt that Heraclitus' language is so metaphorical and an interpretation of his views on fire as primal substance will reveal that he was saying that the apparent stability in the world is an illusion. Fire, we know, produces a flame which flickers and constantly changes. In other words, Heraclitus believed that, from the passing impressions of experience, the mind gets a false idea of the permanence of the world (which is really in a harmonious process of constant change). That is why he said that "All things are an exchange for fire and fire, for all things". Since everything is in a state of flux, constantly changing, Heraclitus made his famous statement that "we can't step into the same river twice because the second time we step into new water, for new waters are ever flowing in upon us".

Heraclitus also had a passionate religious vision of his own. He pointed out that there is one "thing" that doesn't change despite his belief that everything is constantly changing. This "thing", according to him, is the principle or law of change itself. He believed that, although the river is in a state of constant flux, the law that governs its flowing is constant. Heraclitus' idea of God emerged from this view. For him, everything comes to pass in accordance with Logos which is the law that governs change; God was nature or Logos which was the law of nature. He believed that there were good and that there was one supreme deity over them all. This supreme deity, according to him, is immanent and is identified with the order of nature. That is why he says that "God is day and night, water and summer, war and peace..."

Box 4.1: The Doctrine of Change is Heraclitus' Philosophy

Heraclitus' philosophy may simply be summarized as the philosophy of change – in that, he was the philosopher who first argued that the only thing that was constant in life is change.

These are the points to note about his notion of change:

- He claims that the universe is in a perpetual state of flux (change)
- His philosophical thoughts can be described as religious because he claims that God was the Logos and the reason for nature.

Summary of Unit 4

In Unit 4, you have learned that:

1. Heraclitus often spoke in paradoxical terms which make his philosophical thoughts difficult to comprehend.
2. The primary element from which all things were made according to Heraclitus is “fire”.
3. Heraclitus’ philosophy centers around the Greek term “Logos” which he uses to mean “reason”.
4. The Doctrine of Change is fundamental in the philosophy of Heraclitus.
5. It was Heraclitus who used the argument that “we cannot step into the same river twice” to show that change is the only constant thing in the world.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 4

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 4.1 (tests learning outcome 4.1)

What would you consider to be the main idea of Heraclitus’ philosophy?

SAQ 4.2 (tests learning outcome 4.2)

What does Heraclitus use the Greek word “Logos” to mean?

SAQ 4.3 (tests learning outcome 4.3)

What is the doctrine of Change in Heraclitus’ philosophy about?

SAQ 4.4 (tests learning outcome 4.4)

What does Heraclitus consider to be the primary substance which propels change within the universe?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 4

SAQ 4.1: It is the doctrine about primary change within the universe.

SAQ 4.2: He used the Greek Word “Logos” to mean “reason” or the “rational content of the spoken word”.

SAQ 4.3: For Heraclitus, change is the only permanent thing, this made him regard the universe as a ceaseless changing conflict of opposites such that things always coming into being and passing away.

SAQ 4.4: Fire; he believes fire produces a flame which flickers and constantly changes.

Unit 5 Parmenides of Elea

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you will learn about Parmenides who was born in the first half of the fifth century. He spent his philosophical life in Elea which was a city on the western coast of Italy. He founded a movement known as the Eleatic school of philosophy. The Eleatic was named after Elea, Parmenides' hometown. History has it that Parmenides was introduced to philosophy by the Pythagoreans and was probably a younger contemporary of Heraclitus.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 5

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 Define and use correctly all the key words in **bold**. (SAQs 5.1, 5.2, 5.3)
- 5.2 State the two aspects Parmenides divided his ideas into (SAQ 5.2)
- 5.3 State the basic philosophical position of Parmenides (SAQ 5.3)
- 5.4 Describe how Parmenides' philosophical view differs from that of Heraclitus (SAQ 5.4)

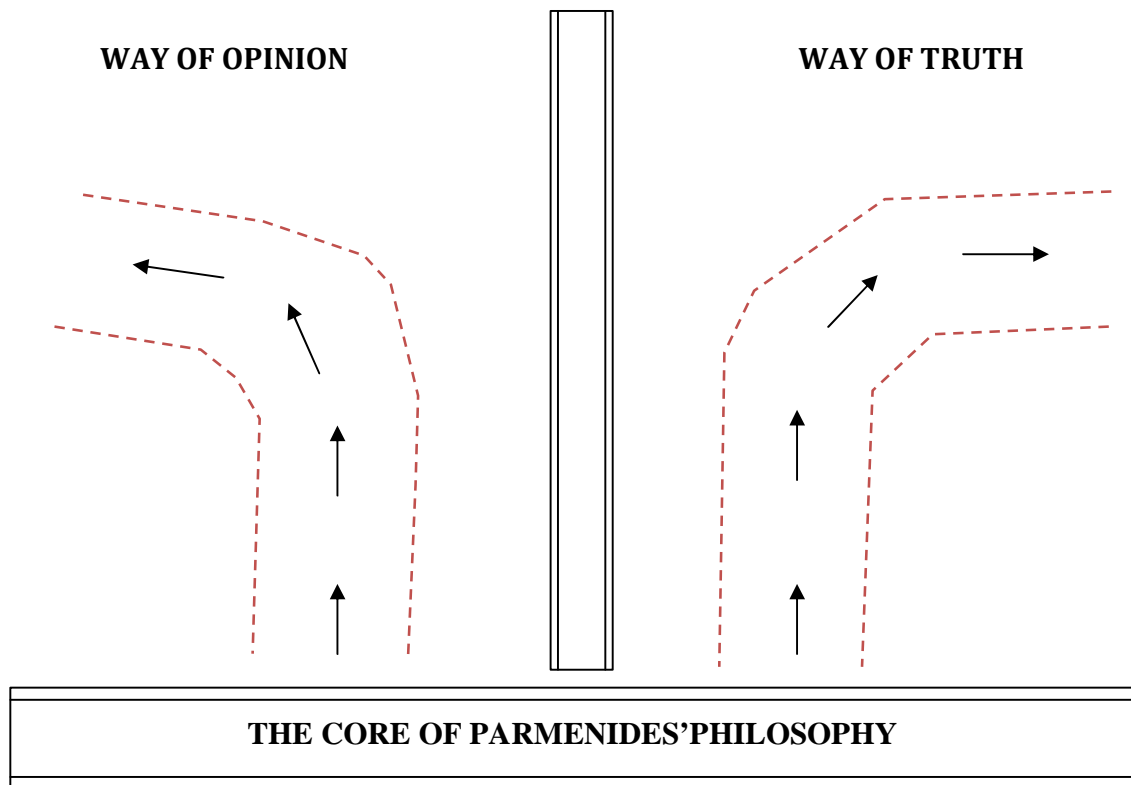
5.1 Parmenides on the Way of Truth and Opinion

Parmenides wrote his philosophical positions in poetry, the epic style he chose in order to avoid the flatness or the dullness of prose. Besides, he chose this style of writing to convey his ideas because he believed that only poetry could explain his philosophical ideas better. He regarded his ideas as a divine revelation from a goddess and wrote a book titled *On Nature*, which he divided into two parts dealing respectively with "truth" and "opinion".

Parmenides tried to distinguish between what he called the **Way of Truth** and the **Way of Opinion**. To show that his philosophical position was a divine revelation, he explained that a goddess appeared to him and taught him the difference between truth and falsehood. He argued that the doctrine of Heraclitus that everything changes belongs to the Way of Opinion and only appears to be true, but not true. He therefore categorizes our sense experience as belonging to the Way of Opinion.

In his philosophy, Parmenides tried to distinguish between two perspectives by which we come to know things. This is what figure 5.1 describes.

Fig 5.1



5.2 Parmenides Denial of the Reality of Change

In his doctrine of opinion, Parmenides maintained that the **plurality** of things or objects in common-sense world – which we see as moving and divisible into parts – cannot be object of true knowledge. In other words, this philosopher is telling us that everything that exists is **permanent**. This is contrary to the philosophical view of Heraclitus who believed that **change** is the only permanent thing. To support his position, Parmenides argued that:

1. Anything that we can think or speak about either exists or doesn't exist;
2. Anything that doesn't exist is nothing;
3. We can't think or speak about nothing;
4. So, we can't think or speak about what doesn't exist;
5. Therefore, anything we can think or speak about exists.

Let us examine the premises of the above argument to have a better understanding of Parmenides' philosophy. From premises (1) to (5) above, we can see that the first premise presents us with two alternatives that are mutually exclusive, "...either exists or doesn't exist". The second premise is a statement we hardly can fault. But the third and fourth premises can stir or cause some controversy because it seems to give the impression that we can't think about nothing. In other words, Parmenides' reasoning seems to be that all thought requires an object. That is, if I think about nothing, my thought would have no content and would not be a thought.

Parmenides claimed that the goddess who visited him instructed him to reject the senses of experience – eye, ear, tongue, and so on – in the light of the revelation that came to him from the independent mind. He was instructed by this goddess to judge by reason alone and, therefore, warned him not to believe in any of the results of sense-perception, and against using the methods of experience and experiment.

In his assessment of the Way of Opinion and the Way of Truth, Parmenides believed that the intellect is the criterion and that whatever the intellect thinks exists. According to him, the mind can't conceive of "Not-Being" and, therefore, "Not-Being" doesn't exist. He maintains that "Being" is the only possible object of thought. With a vigorous analysis of the term "to be", he deduced that what is must be one, eternal, perfect, and invisible. Therefore, the Way of Truth is authentic and the Way of Opinion is seemingly true, since true "being" is single, eternal, immobile, indivisible, and free from void. Thus, according to Parmenides, if something can be thought of at all, it must exist, and so it doesn't make any sense whatsoever to speak about nothing (or something that doesn't exist).

Box 5.1: Parmenides Denial of the Reality of Change

For Parmenides, all that exists in the universe is permanent so there is no room for change.

It is important to note the following about Parmenides philosophy:

- The supposed plurality of things cannot be the true object of knowledge.
- He also believes that it is true the intellect that we can come to know that change is only an illusion of the senses.

Summary of Unit 5

In Unit 5, you have learned that:

1. Parmenides expressed his philosophical views using poetry.
2. Parmenides differs from Heraclitus on the nature of things within the universe; while Heraclitus believes that change is a constant thing, Parmenides holds that all things are permanent and as such there cannot be anything known as change within the universe.
3. Parmenides also claim that he receive some kind of divine revelation from the goddess which made him to reject the evidences produced by the senses.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 5

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 5.1 (tests learning outcome 5.1)

Why did Parmenides deny the plurality (more than one) of things in the universe?

SAQ 5.2 (tests learning outcome 5.2)

Parmenides divided the medium by which human beings can acquire understanding about the world into two. What are they?

SAQ 5.3 (tests learning outcome 5.3)

What would you regard as the central claim of Parmenides philosophy?

SAQ 5.4 (tests learning outcome 5.4)

How is the philosophical position of Parmenides different from Heraclitus?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 5

SAQ 5.1: He did so in order to advance his claim that reality is one, unchanging and Permanent.

SAQ 5.2: The way of Truth and the way of Opinion.

SAQ 5.3: Heraclitus holds that change is the only constant thing while Parmenides denies the reality of change within the universe.

SAQ 5.4: Parmenides' philosophy can be described as the direct opposite of Heraclitus' philosophy. Heraclitus holds that change is the only constant thing while Parmenides denies the reality of change.

Unit 6 The Pluralists

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

You most probably may want to ask about the identity of pluralists as we begin our discussion in this study. Simply put, the pluralists are those philosophers who postulated more than one substance (plural substance) as the source of reality. So in this study, we shall explore the works of pluralists and the two that have been identified are Empedocles and Anaxagoras.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 6

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 Define and use correctly all of the key words printed in **bold**. (SAQs 6.1, 6.2, 6.4)
- 6.2 Describe the philosophical thoughts of Empedocles (SAQs 6.1, 6.2)
- 6.3 State the link between Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles (6.3)
- 6.4 Describe the Pluralist philosophy of Anaxagoras (SAQs 6.4)
- 6.5 State the peculiar contribution Anaxagoras made to philosophy. SAQ (6.5)

6.1 Empedocles of Agragas

6.1.1 The Life and Times of Anaxagoras

Empedocles was a native of Agragas or Agrigentum in Sicily. His dates cannot be fixed but it appears that he lived around 440-443 B.C. He was a philosopher, evolutionist and a religious man who even claimed to be a god. According to an account, he was a healer of the sick and possessed the power to recall the dead to life. Like the Pythagoreans, he believed in the transmigration of souls and practiced ascetic exercises and rituals of purification. He belonged to an Aristocratic family but was trained in the Pythagorean and Parmenidean philosophy. He was fond of teaching and writing poems and was respected for his outstanding intelligence. Because his interests also included the investigation of nature, he is regarded as a philosopher, a poet and a scientist.

Some people consider him the founder of the Sicilian medical school where Philistron (Plato's contemporary) graduated. It is said that Gorgias, the famous Sophist, was his disciple. Empedocles is said to have died in Peloponnesus, but the precise account is not available. One

holds that he disappeared mysteriously into a globe of light; another says that he committed suicide by jumping into the crater of Etna in order to create a belief that he was a god.

6.1.2. The Philosophical Thoughts of Anaxagoras

Though earlier philosophers had posited water, air and fire, regarding the primary substance from which all things are derived, Empedocles added a fourth element, **earth**, and claimed that reality is from the composition of water, air, fire, and earth which corresponds to wet, dry, cold, and hot. He therefore postulated more than one element as the source of all things. This is why he is considered as a pluralist philosopher. For Empedocles, these four elements are eternal, vital, indestructible and divine. With these four elements, he tried to reconcile the theories of Heraclitus that everything changes with that of Parmenides that there is no change, that nothing comes into being and nothing goes out of being. Empedocles believed that both Heraclitus and Parmenides were right despite their conflicting views on “change”. According to him, the four elements – water, air, fire and earth - do not change from being what they are; none of them changes into another but they are the four basic elements with which all things were made. The point he was making is that everything in the universe is the combination of these four elements. When they combine, something new comes into being and, in that sense, we can say that a change has taken place. When they separate something goes out of existence and we can also say, in that case, that a change has also taken place. Thus, the combination and separation of the four elements account for the coming into being of things and their subsequent passing. Looked at from this point of view, the universe manifests change, but the four elements themselves do not change for they are eternal, indestructible, and unchanging. So the four elements are permanently what they are in the midst of changes brought about by their combination and separation.

Furthermore, Empedocles believed that there are forces in nature which either unite or separate the elements in a fourfold circular process which constantly repeats itself. These are love and strife, or harmony and discord. In the first phase of the process, the elements are mixed together by love; in the second, they begin to separate as strife enters; in the third, strife dominates over love and the elements are completely separated; in the fourth, love enters again, uniting the elements once more. Therefore, these forces cause the four elements to intermingle and separate, leading to what he referred to as principle of unification and principle of division. Hate causes separation, while love causes intermingling which constitutes motion. He explained that change and motion are constant throughout life and are repeated over and over again in a cycle of separation and intermingling, but the four roots or elements remain invariable and eternal.

6.2 Anaxagoras of Clazomenae

Anaxagoras was born in Clazomenae in Asia Minor around 500 B.C. and was the first philosopher to settle in Athens which later became the centre of Greek philosophy. History has it

that Anaxagoras was forced to leave Athens because of his political relationship with Pericles. Pericles was an Athenian statesman and general and the most influential politician in Athens during his time.

Anaxagoras strongly detested mythological explanations and was renowned for his naturalistic approach to the world. According to an historical account, Anaxagoras was charged with heresy and exiled from Athens because he claimed that the sun was a white-hot stone and not a deity as the people of Athens were formerly made to believe. Another story that confirmed his strong dislike for mythologies has to do with the story of a one-horned ram that was given to Pericles during the Peloponnesian war. A soothsayer proclaimed that the ram was a gift from the gods and that Pericles needed to possess it to be victorious in battle. Anaxagoras was angry with the soothsayer and, to prove that the soothsayer was wrong, killed the ram and dissected its skull. He later discovered that the lack of two horns was caused by brain tumour. He then told the gathering that the lack of two horns was a natural phenomenon, not a miraculous sign as the soothsayer claimed.

Unlike Empedocles whose pluralism recognizes four elements, Anaxagoras believed that there is infinite number of elements or “seeds” from which everything grow. In other words, different things come to be by the accumulation of similar “germs” in different quantities. Anaxagoras pointed out that if we take a thing and divide it, we will never obtain the roots specified by Empedocles. Therefore, in the smallest part of everything, there are minute parts of all other things.

Anaxagoras was the first philosopher to distinguish between matter and mind (or *Nous*). According to this philosopher, the dynamics of nature couldn't be explained by matter alone. He then explained that mind or *nous* is the source of motion and the principle of order. One might suspect that *nous* is probably a spiritual thing, but Anaxagoras didn't define it as a spiritual substance. He claimed that other things have a portion of everything, but **mind** (*nous*) mixes with nothing; it is the most rarefied of all things. One can say that Anaxagoras' philosophy is probably the beginning of vague dualism. However, the **nous** isn't a spiritual substance but a kind of rarefied matter.

Activity 6.1

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Based on your learning experience, you should be able to note that the philosophies of the pluralists (especially Empedocles) aims to accommodate the views of other philosophers within theirs in order to have a more robust philosophical systems. See the figure below:

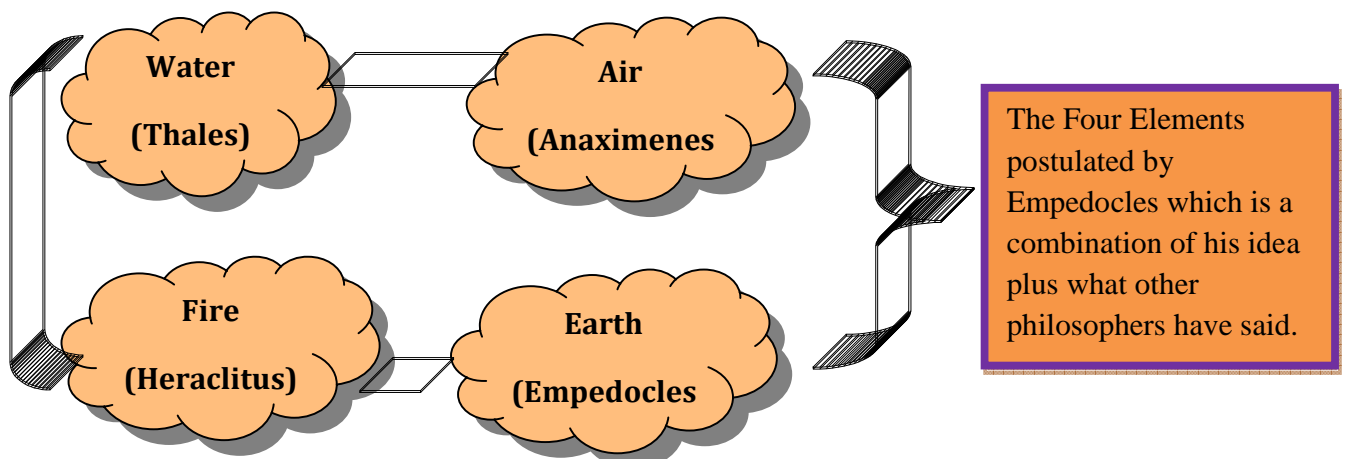


Fig 6.1

Activity 6.1 Feedback:

Take a look at figure 6.1; it describes the various ideas borrowed by Empedocles in order to form his own philosophical idea.

In what follows, we have brought the pluralists' philosophy into focus, especially as it concerns the thoughts expressed by Empedocles and Anaxagoras on what constitutes the ultimate nature of reality. This is represented in Box 6.2

Box 6.1: The Philosophical Thoughts of Anaxagoras

Anaxagoras was credited with having a philosophical temperament that rejects mythology which most probably led him to achieve certain feats.

It is important to note the following:

- The dualistic conception of mind and body.
- He holds that reality is plural rather than single.

Summary of Unit 6

In Unit 6, you have learned that:

1. The Pluralists are unique in the sense that they postulated plural/many elements as the substance of reality.
2. Empedocles used his own philosophy to mediate the quarrel between Heraclitus doctrine on change and Parmenides doctrine of Permanence.
3. Empedocles considers “Earth” as the fundamental substance which exists with other substances like air, fire and water.
4. Although Empedocles restricted the number of substances he claims exist to four, Anaxagoras claims that the substance from which all things were made are limitless or uncountable.
5. Anaxagoras was the first philosopher to distinguish between matter and mind.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 6

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 6.1 (tests learning outcome 6.1)

What are the important concepts in Empedocles and Anaxagoras’ philosophy?

SAQ 6.2 (tests learning outcome 6.2)

What is the basic philosophical achievement of Empedocles?

SAQ 6.3 (tests learning outcome 6.3)

In what sense can Empedocles be regarded as a reconciliatory philosopher?

SAQ 6.4 (tests learning outcome 6.4)

Why is Anaxagoras regarded as a Pluralist?

SAQ 6.5 (tests learning outcome 6.5)

Anaxagoras is said to be the first philosopher to do what?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 6

SAQ 6.1: The term “earth” is central to Empedocles, while the term “mind/nous” is central to the Anaxagoras’ philosophy.

SAQ 6.2: Prior to Empedocles, philosophers had posited water, air and fire, regarding the primary substance from which all things are derived; he added a fourth element, to these, namely, earth.

SAQ 6.3: He tried to reconcile the theories of Heraclitus that everything changes with that of Parmenides that there is no change.

SAQ 6.4: He postulated a pluralism that recognizes four elements; Anaxagoras believed that there is infinite number of elements or “seeds” from which everything grow.

SAQ 6.5: Anaxagoras was the first philosopher to distinguish between matter and mind

Unit 7 The Sophists

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you will learn about the Sophists who were members of the last generations of Greek philosophers before Plato, of the period 450 B.C. to 400 B.C. They were itinerant professional teachers of “wisdom” and “eloquence” who moved from one place to another, teaching philosophy, grammar and rhetoric to people, especially the youths. In fact, they offered the equivalent of university education and, for a hefty fee, taught rhetoric - how to argue a case in a law court or among assembly of men. It is noteworthy that their philosophical attitude was inspired by the earlier Greek philosophers. The thoughts of the following three sophists shall be considered: Protagoras, Georgias and Thrasymachus.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 7

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 Define and understand the meaning of the terms printed in **bold** (SAQ’ 6.1, 6.2)
- 7.2 Describe the philosophical attitude of the Sophists (SAQ 6.3)
- 7.3 State the basic influence on the Sophists’ philosophical attitude (SAQ 6.4)

7.1 The Sophists and their Philosophies

7.1.1. Protagoras of Abdera

The most influential of the Sophists, Protagoras flourished between 490-420 B.C. His famous assertion is “man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are, of those that are not that they are not”. This relativistic slogan conveys the idea that it is man who decides for himself what exists and what does not exist, what is true and what is not true. The problem with this relativistic slogan is that it allows for endless debates on issues and makes an object to have contradicting properties, i.e. if one person takes it one way and another takes it in a contradictory way.

Protagoras also made a sceptical statement concerning the existence of the gods. He says: “With regards to the gods, I cannot feel sure either that they are or that they are not, nor what they are in figure; for there are many things that hinder sure knowledge, the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life”.

7.1.2. Gorgias of Leontini

Primarily a teacher of rhetoric, Gorgias flourished between 483-375 B.C. and came to Athens as an ambassador and was widely known as a proponent of slave-owning democracy. In his philosophical treatise entitled *On Not-being or Nature*, Gorgias supplemented the **relativism** of Protagoras with rationalistic agnosticism. Thus, he advanced three propositions: cosmological speculations offered by the earlier philosophers because they felt that the earlier philosophers could not give or propound an error-free doctrine about the ultimate nature of the world. In other words, they held that the very foundations of cosmology were in great conflict since the earlier Greek philosophers saw the ultimate nature of the world differently. The fact that earlier Greek philosophers could not reach a consensus in their cosmological speculations, perhaps, made the Sophists to frown at the idea of following the step of the earlier philosophers and show great interest in man and the society.

Being critical, the Sophists questioned the foundations of popular beliefs, religious and moral beliefs, traditional institutions and customs, and so on. Thus, the Sophists shared a common philosophical attitude, a common **scepticism** which is spelt out in their mistrust of the possibility of absolute knowledge. At this juncture, we can say that “scepticism” started with the Sophists. As thinkers with argued views, the Sophists emphasized the contrast between what exists by nature and what exists only by human convention. This led not only to moral relativism (what is right here depends entirely on what this society thinks is right) but also to amorality (morality is a matter merely of conventions, which the intelligent and strong man will disregard). Such views, together with the thought that they taught how to make the worse case appear the better, made the word become an uncomplimentary one. It is worthy of note that Gorgias is a sophist who is reputable for his strong denial of the possibility of absolute knowledge, the existence of objective and universal truths. This made him to put forward the following arguments:

1. Nothing exists
2. If anything exists, it cannot be known
3. If it can be known, it cannot be communicated to others.

That is, anything is not real; if anything were real, it would still be unknowable; if anything were knowable, it would still be inexpressible. This proposition was an attempt by Gorgias to prove the impossibility of nature existing at all. But some writers have argued that whether Gorgias himself believed the striking conclusions of his propositions remains a matter of scholarly debate.

No doubt, from what we have said so far, two facts emerge about the sophists: the first is that the Sophists were very critical and they rejected virtually all the old hypotheses about the ultimate nature of the world. Also they are scholars who moved from place to place teaching people within the society.

- Suppose you have an uncle who is a teacher and moves from one school to another, can you then describe him as a sophist? Note that the sophists were also teachers who moved from one place to another.
- The truth of the matter is that you will not be able to describe your uncle in this case as a sophist because apart from being an itinerant teacher, one has to be critically or sceptical minded to be described as a sophist.

7.1.3 Thrasyarchus

A native of Chalcedon, a colony of Megara, Thrasyarchus was active in the latter half of the fifth century B.C. Much of what is known today about Thrasyarchus is found in Plato's *Republic*. It is said that Thrasyarchus excelled in the art of playing upon the feeling of the audience. It is said also that his oratory was of great value to political orators of Athens who learned his method of arousing anger and then lulling it again; and of causing and settling dissensions.

It is reported in Plato's *Republic* that Thrasyarchus' most famous declaration is that justice is the advantage of the stronger. Hence the aphorism "might is right". He held that only the weak practice justice and that the unjust persons, who are stronger, establish themselves in power and make laws for people in the state to obey.

Activity 7.1

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Based on your learning experience, and knowing that we have looked at the philosophies of three major sophists, note down some of the doctrines that feature in their thought systems as depicted below:

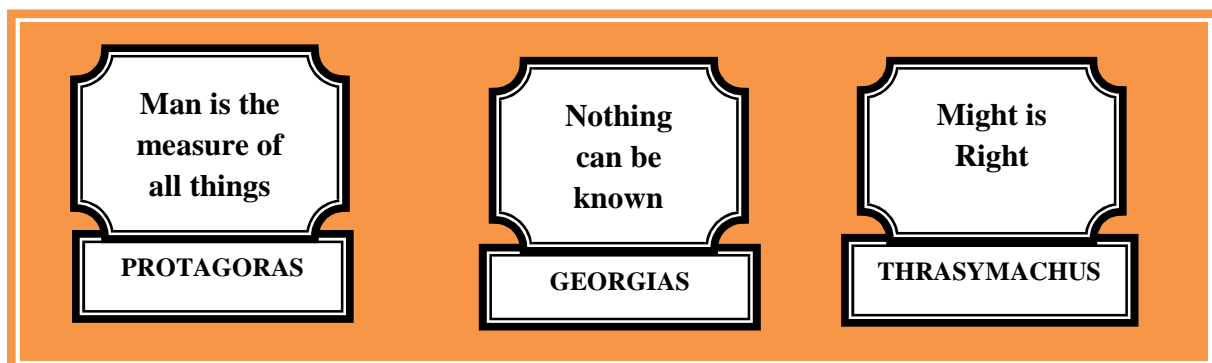


Fig 7.1

Activity 7.1 Feedback:

Take a look at the figure 7.1 above, it describes the various sceptical views presented by the sophists. This shows that the sophists' philosophical thoughts are not univocal.

It is important to note that the sophists' philosophical thoughts introduced a new dimension to the philosophical enterprise in the ancient period.

Box 7.1: The Philosophies of the Sophists

The Sophists can be distinguished from other set of thinkers that existed in the ancient period because they introduced skepticism to philosophy.

It is important to note that:

- The Sophists philosophical attitude was very critical.
- The Sophist did not believe knowledge should be free that is they believe people should pay huge price for learning.

Summary of Unit 7

In Unit 7, you have learned that:

1. The Sophists are itinerant teachers of wisdom and knowledge.
2. The Sceptical philosophy of the Sophists (especially Protagoras) leads to relativism.
3. Georgia, a Sophist, was highly critical about the possibility of human knowledge, and in fact, some of them denied that human being can acquire knowledge.
4. Thrasymachus, who is one of the sophists held the doctrine that justice is the advantage of the stronger.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 7

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 7.1 (tests learning outcome 7.1)

What do you understand by the term “scepticism”?”

SAQ 7.2 (tests learning outcome 7.2)

Relativism is a term that features prominently in our discussion of the Sophists’ philosophy. What is relativism?

SAQ 7.3 (tests learning outcome 7.3)

What is the philosophical attitude of the Sophists?

SAQ 7.4 (tests learning outcome 7.4)

Who are the set of philosophers that influenced the philosophical attitude of the Sophists?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit7

SAQ 7.1: Scepticism is the view propagated by the Sophist which implies the denial of the possibility of human knowledge.

SAQ 7.2: This is the view that man is the one who decides what exists and what does not exist; what is true and what is not true.

SAQ 7.3: The philosophical attitude of the Sophist is Scepticism.

SAQ 7.4: The philosophical attitude was inspired by the earlier Greek philosophers.

Unit 8 Socrates

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

This study session introduces you to Socrates and his motivating inferences. It explores the life and times of Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers that ever lived. Socrates stands as one of the philosophers who showed courage in the face of many difficulties in life and even death. It is the task of this study to attempt an expose on the life and times of this great thinker.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 8

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 8.1 Compare and contrast the philosophy of Socrates and that of the Sophists on knowledge (SAQ 8.1)
- 8.2 Explain the term “Socratic Paradox” (SAQ 8.2)
- 8.3 To State the meaning of “gadfly” a term used by Socrates to describes himself (SAQ 8.3)
- 8.4 Describe the means by which Socrates taught his philosophical doctrines (SAQ 8.4)

8.1 About Socrates

8.1.1 The Background of Socrates

Socrates was born in 470 B.C. in Athens. Unlike Plato, his disciple, he came from humble circumstances: his father was a sculptor and his mother a midwife. Socrates is one of the most interesting in all of Greek history. All his life, Socrates claimed to be the recipient of messages from a mysterious voice which counselled him at the critical moments of his life. At first, many Athenians misunderstood Socrates to be a Sophist because his analysis of every subject resembled the technique employed by the Sophists. As a matter of fact, he was upset by the teachings and practices of the Sophists who seemed to oppose Socrates’ concern, namely, the good of the human soul. He wanted to keep Athens from the moral destruction toward which the Sophists were leading it.

8.1.2 The Difference between Socrates and the Sophists

Like the Sophists, however Socrates wandered from place to place discussing moral issues and convictions with the people he met on the street. But he differed from the Sophists in several ways. Thus, unlike the Sophists who used rhetoric and long elaborate speeches in their teachings, Socrates taught in plain language. Unlike the Sophists, Socrates didn't receive any money for his teachings and was greatly opposed to the teaching of the Sophists concerning the relativism in both the moral and the logical order. Because he openly attacked the Sophists' ways of life and teachings, the young people in Athens were attracted to him and became his followers.

As human beings, we are bound to see things from different perspectives and this is often responsible for various approaches to issues. Now, imagine a scenario where you and your friend were giving the task of making a presentation on what Christmas means to you. Suppose you decide to write a poem to convey your idea, your friend may decide to convey his by composing a song.

- Worthy of note here is that both you and your friend have the same objectives but different medium of expression. Applying this scenario to the case of Socrates and the Sophists, what would you say is the bone of contention?
- Socrates and the Sophists are both focused on expressing certain philosophical themes, ideas or concepts but they differ fundamentally on the approach to achieve such a task.

8.2 The Trial and Death of Socrates

As a result of the respect which Socrates earned among the youths, the Sophists became very angry with him. Again, they felt that the philosopher had humiliated them on several occasions and had done great damage to their reputation and relevance in Athens. They swore vengeance and, later, Socrates was brought before an Athenian court. The jury, however, was made up of the very people who had been humiliated and offended by Socrates during his long career. In the court, he was described as an evil-doer and a curious person, searching into things under the earth and above the heaven; and making the worse appear the better cause, and teaching all this to others. He was thus accused of introducing strange gods to the people and corrupting the youth by asking them not to worship the gods of the Athenian state. During his trial, Socrates pleaded to his prosecutors that he was a gadfly (that is, someone who criticizes other people in order to make them do something) sent by God to the Athenian state. He later suggested that the jury grant him a pension and they responded by sentencing him to death. In 399 B.C. he was condemned to die by drinking the poison hemlock. Before his death, Socrates had the opportunity to escape from prison, but refused to do so, considering flight a betrayal of his

moral teachings. Besides, he believed that death is a dreamless sleep which is plainly good. According to him, when a good man dies, his soul migrates to another world where he can freely converse without being persecuted.

Activity 8.1

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Based on your learning experience, and knowing that Socrates was accused and tried by those who opposed his philosophical teaching, note down some of the key accusations that were levelled against him as depicted in what follows;

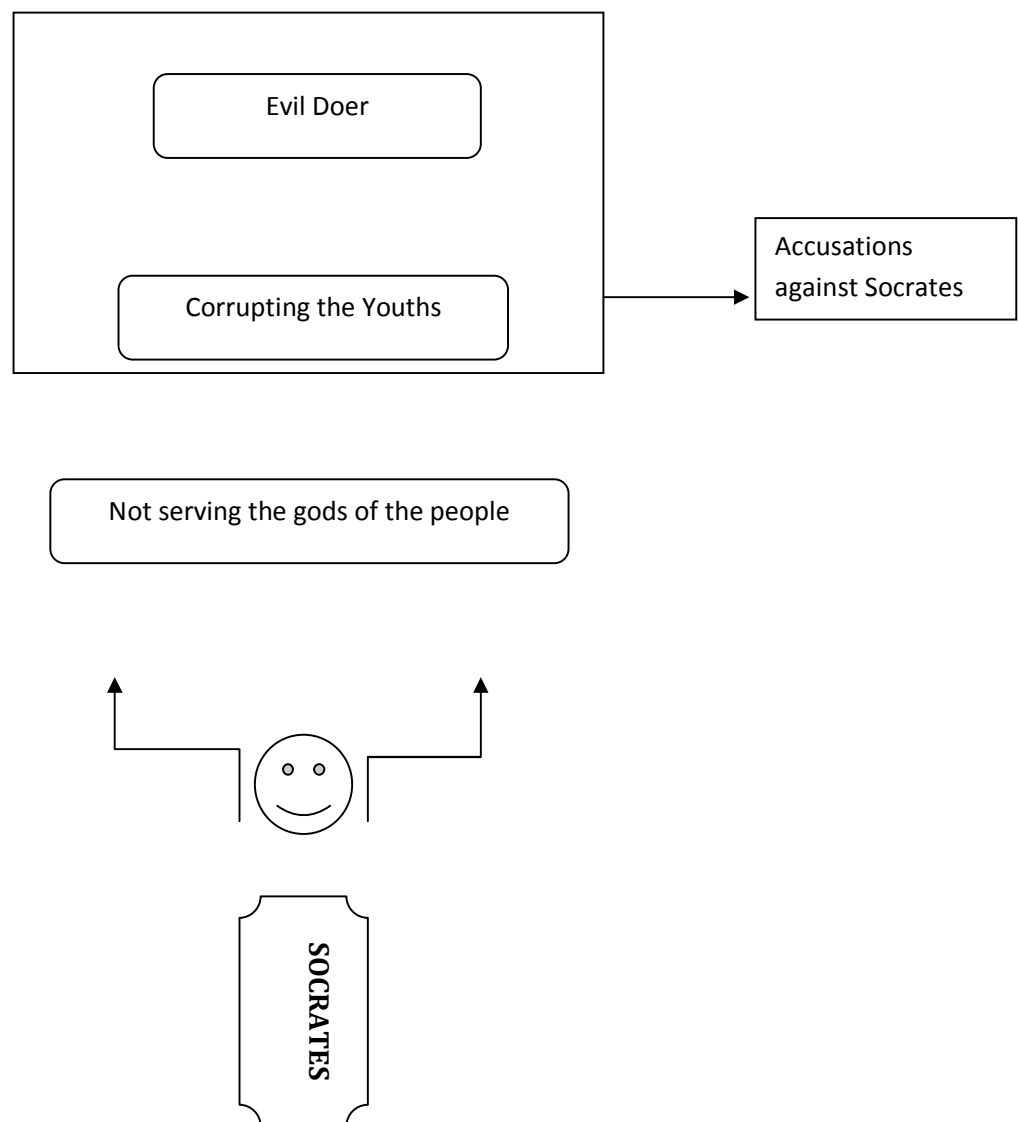


Fig 8.1

Activity 8.1 Feedback:

Fig. 8.1 shows clearly some of the accusations levelled against Socrates which led to his trial and eventual death.

8.3 The Teachings of Socrates

Socrates taught by means of dialogue. He would begin by pretending that he was completely ignorant on the subject in question. His pretended ignorance was of course ironic. He wanted to show the contrast between himself and the Sophists, who always claimed to know everything. He also tried to free his listeners from prejudices, which were the major obstacles to the acquisition of true knowledge.

Let us look at the aspect of Socrates' philosophy called "Socratic Paradox". Socrates taught that virtue is the most valuable of all possessions, and that knowledge and virtue are the same thing. So Socrates, while speaking paradoxically affirms that knowing one's ignorance is the basis of all forms of knowledge. By identifying knowledge and virtue, Socrates meant also to say that vice, or evil, is the absence of knowledge and, therefore, vice results from ignorance. This is the basis for Socrates' view that no one ever committed an evil act knowingly. In other words, for Socrates, a bad man is a bad man through ignorance; the man who doesn't follow the good fails to do so because he doesn't recognize it.

Socrates never wrote anything; it is certain that he committed none of his doctrines to writing. His teachings were transcribed by other philosophers, especially his pupils, Xenophon and Plato. But the popular belief is that it is Plato who had a deeper insight into the teachings of Socrates. For the purpose of emphasis, some of the teachings of Socrates are outlined in Box 8.1 below.

Box 8.1: The Teachings of Socrates

We have stated that Socrates is one of the greatest philosophers that ever lived. This high regard that is accorded to Socrates is not unconnected with his teachings.

It is important to note some of the teachings of Socrates:

- Virtue is a highly valuable human attribute so all should strive to live a life of virtue.

Summary of Unit 8

In Unit 8, you have learned that:

5. Socrates, by living an exemplary life, he was able to convince his people, contrary to the teachings of the Sophists, that knowledge is attainable.
6. Socrates endeavoured to establish the notion of the good which explains why he is generally regarded as the father of moral philosophy.
7. Socrates lived the life of an ideal philosopher, thereby teaching many people the importance of the pursuit of wisdom. The pursuit of wisdom is the main purpose of philosophy.
8. Socrates helped the Athenians to overcome the vain speculation and pretentious wisdom of the Sophists.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 8

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 8.1 (tests learning outcome 8.1)

In what two ways does Socrates differ from the Sophists?

SAQ 8.2 (tests learning outcome 8.2)

What does “Socratic-paradox” mean?

SAQ 8.3 (tests learning outcome 8.3)

What sort of person can be described as a gadfly?

SAQ 8.4 (tests learning outcome 8.4)

What is the medium employed by Socrates in his teachings?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 8

SAQ 8.1: Socrates never collects money for teaching philosophy like the Sophists and Socrates used simple language to teach unlike the Sophists who use rhetoric and elaborate speeches.

SAQ 8.2: Socratic paradox is the view held by Socrates which stipulates that knowledge of one's ignorance is the best form of knowledge.

SAQ 8.3: Someone who criticizes other people in order to make them do something.

SAQ 8.4: Socrates taught by the means of dialogue.

Unit 9 Plato

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you will be introduced to the philosophical thoughts of Plato. Plato was born around 428 B.C. into an aristocratic Athenian family. He received an excellent education, especially in, mathematics and literature, and studied philosophy under Cratylus, a disciple of Heraclitus. At the stage of twenty, he met Socrates and became his faithful disciple. When Socrates was put to death, Plato set out on extensive travels and Socrates' death may have been the turning point in his life. He went first to Megara, where he met Euclid and the Parmenidean School still flourishing in that city. It is also certain that he came into contact with the Pythagorean School. Upon his return to Athens, he founded his own school, which he called the Academy. Among the most famous of his works was *The Republic*. In *The Republic*, Plato argued that society would never be just unless people with philosophical vision became rulers (philosopher-kings) or rulers acquired philosophical wisdom. To prove his point, Plato travelled to Syracuse, in Sicily, to educate Dionysius, the young ruler who had inherited the throne. Dionysius was a tyrant and Plato believed he could make him the model philosopher-king he had envisioned in *The Republic*. But Plato failed in his mission, because Dionysius was too committed to tyranny and had little interest in philosophy. At the end of this study, we should be able to achieve the following:

Learning Outcomes for Unit 9

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 9.1 Define and use correctly all of the key words printed in **bold** (SAQs 9.1, 9.2).
- 9.2 Describe Plato's view on the constituent of reality (SAQ 9.3).
- 9.3 State the distinction Plato made with the Allegory of the Cave (SAQ 9.4)
- 9.4 Describe Plato's conception of the Human Soul (SAQ 9.5).

9.1 The Doctrines of Plato

9.1.1 The World of Forms

One of the outstanding elements in Plato's philosophy is the doctrine of Forms. Plato is of the view that reality consist in the world of form. In fact, the doctrine of Form is the nucleus of the whole body of

Plato's philosophical enterprise. One could rightly say that the doctrine of Forms form the basis of Plato's **Metaphysics**. Forms or Ideas for Plato "are those changeless, eternal and nonmaterial essences of which the actual objects we see are only poor copies." For instance, Plato holds that there is the Form of the Triangle and all other triangles we see are mere copies of that Form. Again, Plato holds that it is because we know the idea of Beauty and recognize that a person shares more or less in this idea that we speak of a beautiful person. Hence, beautiful person is a copy of Beauty. Beauty for Plato is not a mere concept. It has an objective reality. Things become beautiful but Beauty always *is*. In other words, Beauty has a separate existence from those changing things which move in and out of Beauty.

Plato observed that things are never fully what they are as there are the ever-changing and imperfect natures of sensible objects here on earth. However, he knew that it is possible to formulate perfect conception of at least some things, particularly of geometrical figures. His world of forms is the world of what-truly-is and it also constitutes the authentic object of knowledge, which is attained in the level of opinion, which deals with apparent reality and in the level of genuine knowledge which is the highest. The level of opinion is based on sense-knowledge and belief which are merely representational in the sense that they are unstable, in constant flux, imperfect, even decaying. The highest level is found in rational, universal knowledge and its object is the realm of eternal and intelligible forms and it's reached when the mind has direct access to the forms. The form is neither a product nor a mere structure of the human mind and there exists a form for every sort of being, thus, there is the world of the living beings and the form of inanimate bodies.

Going by what Plato opines, every form of existent thing within the material world is to be considered as mere copies of their real essence in the world of form.

- Suppose your friend bought a new car and asked you to tell her whether the car is real or not, going by Plato's doctrine on the world of forms. How would you answer such?
- A good answer to that friend of yours would be to say that, the car is a mere imperfect copy of the real car in the world of form because Plato believes that the real essences of all things consist in the world of form.

9.1.2. The Allegory of the Cave

In the allegory of the cave, Plato imagined that there are some lifelong prisoners chained to a wall in an underground cave where they can see only shadows on the wall opposite them. The shadows are cast by various statues or vessel carried by some people along a small road which is lined with a parapet placed between the road and the prisoners. A big fire is also burning on a lofty place beyond the parapet and the road. It gives the necessary light for the shadows to appear on the wall. The prisoners can perceive the shadows by means of their senses. These are mere representation of the lowest degree of knowledge, namely the perception of images. If a prisoner were to escape from the chains, he could turn at first towards the statutes or vessels and see them in the flickering firelight. This type of knowledge still belongs to a lower level of knowledge, namely, belief. Its main object is visible things. If a prisoner were to escape outside the cave into the sunlight itself, he would be dazzled at first. His eyes

would ache and he would hardly see. But, once accustomed to light, he would discover the world of true realities which are illumined by the sun. This other world represents the realm of forms. At this state, the knowing person relates to the intelligent world. He now has to make the choice of remaining in the real world or going back to the prison which is the world of shadows. Even if he were to go back to the cave and tell the other prisoners about the real world, they would not believe him since all through their life they have become accustomed to shadows as the real thing that are.

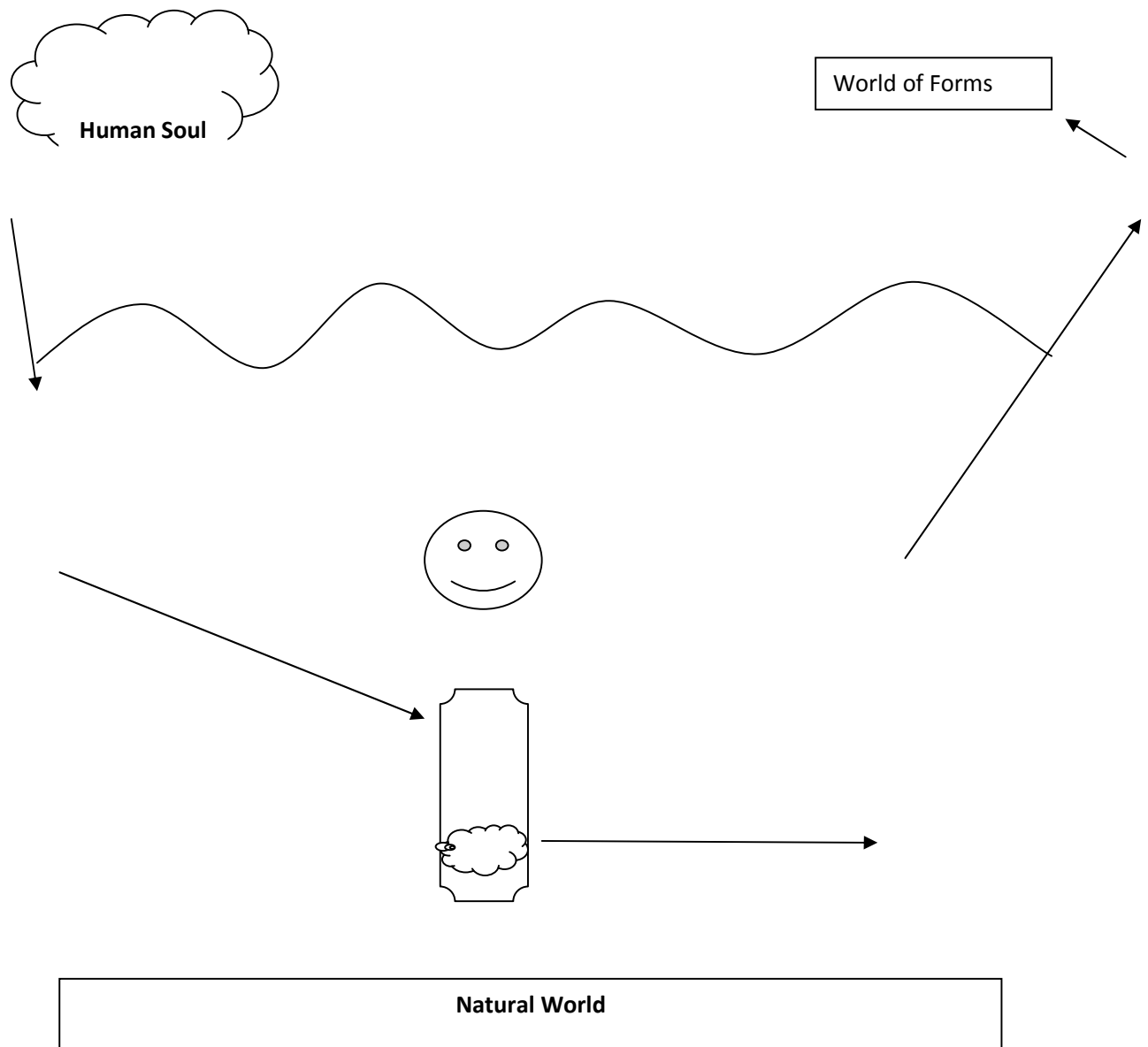
9.1.3. Plato's Concept of Man

Plato held that the human soul pre-existed before its union with the body. And **knowledge** for him is reminiscing, that is, remembrance. The soul is divine; it is immortal, immaterial and spiritual. Its union with the body is purely accidental; it formally existed without a body and will continue to exist after its separation from the body at death. Plato produces some arguments to prove the immortality of the soul:

1. In the first argument Plato says contraries generally follow contraries, e.g., light follows darkness as darkness follows light; good and bad are contraries; life and death; the state of being awake and being asleep are contraries. Following this pattern, if death follows life, then one would expect that life in turn will follow death.
2. The second argument is based on the soul's knowledge. When we acquire knowledge, what happens is that the soul simply remembers what it used to know in its pre-existent state. For example, the ideas of justice, equality of all men, goodness, and so on, were ideas the soul brought with it in its pre-existence in the world of forms. And if the soul existed without the body in the world of forms, it follows that it is also capable of existing without the body after death.
3. The third argument is based on his doctrine of forms. The objects of knowledge are the forms which are immutable and immaterial realities. If the soul is able to grasp these immaterial, eternal forms, it means it is able to come in contact with them. To be able to do this, it means the soul must itself be of the same nature as the forms. This means the soul too is immaterial, eternal and immutable.
4. The fourth argument is the claim that since the soul is immaterial or spiritual, it means it is not composed of parts. Only things that are composed can eventually become decomposed.
5. Since the soul is the principle of life, it cannot at the same time admit the contrary principle of death. The soul is a principle of life because it participates in the form of life- that is why it cannot admit the form of death.
6. The sixth argument says whatever is moved by another being can cease to exist when it ceases to be moved by that other being. But the soul is not a being moved by any other being outside itself. It is a self-moving principle, hence it will not cease to exist because it will not cease to be moved since it moves itself.

Activity 9.1

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Based on what you have learnt on Plato, you will see that Plato held a dualistic view of man as having both immaterial and material aspects. The figure below gives an illustration on his concept of man.



Activity 9.1 Feedback:

Take a look at the figure above; it describes the movement of the human soul from the pre-existent world to the body of man in the natural world then it finally moves away from the human body after death, back to the world of form.

However, as we conclude this study session on Plato, some critical remarks would be appropriate. A critical look at Plato's concept of man will show that his arguments are not conclusive. Let us take the first argument, for example: it is not always the case that contraries always follow contraries. These are cases where contraries do not follow contraries. For example, one may become weak and never recover and simply die that way. A person may sleep and never wake up.

The second argument about reminiscing:- we can know these things by intuition or by simple abstractions from our contact with things in the world.

The third argument can only be valid if only we agree that there is a transcendental world of forms.

The other three arguments are also not conclusive. One has to believe in the theory of forms, the idea of a soul in man and the assertion that the soul is a self-moving principle. Plato divides the soul into three parts, namely, the Rational part, the Spirited part and the Appetitive part.

We have seen that for Plato the soul is something divine. The rational part of the soul is the highest part of the soul which is to guide the whole man. The spirited part (or the courageous part) corresponds to man's emotions, while the appetitive part corresponds to man's lower emotions or sensual desires. Plato illustrates this tripartite nature of the soul with the analogy of a charioteer and two horses one of which is tamed and well behaved, and another which is intractable and very difficult to control. The charioteer (the driver) is the rational part of the soul (reason). The tamed horse is the spirited parts (the higher emotions) while the bad and intractable horse is the appetitive part (the lower emotions or sensual desires). It is the duty of the charioteer (man's reason) to direct the two horses and bring them under control.

Box 9.1: The Doctrines of Plato

In this study we have attempted a discussion on the philosophical thoughts of Plato. It is important to note that:

- Plato's metaphysics centers on his idea on the world of forms.
- His notion on the allegory of the cave makes a clear distinction between appearance and reality.
- Plato held a notion of Knowledge as a phenomenon that is acquired by reminiscence.

Summary of Unit 9

In Unit 9, you have learned that:

- 1 Plato argued that society would never be just unless people with philosophical wisdom become rulers or rulers begin to philosophize.
- 2 Plato held that his world of forms is the world of what-truly-is and it also constitutes the authentic object of knowledge.
- 3 The allegory of the cave is an analogical argument that depicts the distinction between the real nature things and things as they appear.
- 4 Plato maintains a dualistic conception of man; he believes man is composed of both a soul and a body.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 9

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 9.1 (tests learning outcome 9.1)

Plato's doctrine on the world of form is said to be expressed in his metaphysics; what is metaphysics?

SAQ 9.2 (tests learning outcome 9.2)

What is Plato's conception of Knowledge?

SAQ 9.3 (tests learning outcome 9.3)

According to Plato, reality consists in what world?

SAQ 9.4 (tests learning outcome 9.4)

Why did Plato use the allegory of the cave to achieve?

SAQ 9.5 (tests learning outcome 9.5)

How would you describe Plato's conception of Man?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 9

SAQ 9.1: metaphysics is the aspect of philosophy that studies the ultimate nature of reality both physical and non-physical.

SAQ 9.2: Plato held a conception of knowledge as a product of reminiscing or remembrance.

SAQ 9.3: For Plato, reality consists in the world of form.

SAQ 9.4: He used it to show the distinction between appearance and reality

SAQ 9.5: Plato's conception of man is dualistic.

Unit 10 Aristotle

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you are going to learn about Aristotle who is considered by many people to be the greatest philosopher among the golden age philosophers. He was one of the most important founding figures in western philosophy. He was a professional teacher, the first person to write like a professor. His writings are very systematic. Aristotle was born at Stagira, Chalcidice in the year 384BC. His father, Nicomechus, was a physician to king Amyntas of Macedon. It was from Nicomechus that Aristotle derived his interest in biology. At the age of eighteen Aristotle went to Athens and, for twenty years, followed the lectures of Plato, even though he was not an Athenian. After the death of Plato, Aristotle left Athens and went to Asia Minor for some time; there he got married to Hermias' adoptive daughter, Pythias. He then went to Lesbos where it was proved from his biological works that he studied zoological phenomena. Aristotle did not die in Athens; he went to Chalcis in Euboia where he died of a stomach complaint in 322 B.C.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 10

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 10.1 Describe Aristotle's contribution to Logic (SAQ 10.1)
- 10.2 State the central notion in Aristotle's metaphysics (SAQ 10.2)
- 10.3 State the essential concept in Aristotle's Ethics (SAQ 10.3)
- 10.4 Describe Aristotle's idea of a Political Society (SAQ 10.4)

10.1 The vast scope of Aristotle's Philosophy

Aristotle's writings constitute first at creating a comprehensive system of western philosophy which includes morality and aesthetics, logic and science, politics and metaphysics. Aristotle's views on the physical sciences profoundly shaped medieval scholarship and their influence extended well into the renaissance, although they were replaced by Newtonian physics. In the biological sciences, some of his observations were confirmed to be accurate only in the nineteenth century. His works include what was earlier known as formal study of logic which was incorporated into the modern formal logic. In metaphysics, Aristotelianism had a profound influence on philosophical and theological thinking, especially in the eastern orthodox theology and the scholastic tradition of the Catholic Church. All aspects of Aristotle's philosophy continue

to be the objects of active academic study today. Though he wrote many elegant treatises and dialogues, it is thought that the majority of his writings are now lost even though it was said that Aristotle's writings were mostly his class notes which were compiled together by his pupils. Aristotle's concept of philosophy agrees with that of Plato. Aristotle defined philosophy as the matrix of all arts and sciences. His systematic writings and scientific outlook of the world made him attach a theoretical value to philosophy. In fact, Aristotle made philosophy to be coextensive with scientific knowledge. According to him, science can be practical, poetical or theoretical. By practical science he means politics and ethics; under poetical science he includes not only the philosophy of poetry but also the knowledge of other imitative arts; while physics, mathematics and metaphysics come under theoretical science.

10.2 Aristotle on Logic

Aristotle is regarded as the founder of formal logic. Just as Plato was supreme in metaphysics, Aristotle was recognized as an authority in logic and retained his position throughout the middle ages. His most important work in logic is the doctrine of syllogism. A syllogism is an argument which consists of three parts, namely, a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion. A good example of syllogism is:

All men are mortal (major premise)

Socrates is a man (minor premise)

Therefore Socrates is mortal (conclusion)

Apart from syllogism, there are other logical writings of Aristotle which are of great importance in the history of philosophy. One of these is his work on categories. Categories can be defined as ways in which we think about things and how they relate to each other. Under categories, therefore, Aristotle identified substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action and affection. Before an individual can prove or demonstrate something, he or she must have a very clear starting point for reasoning process. An individual must therefore specify the object matter he is discussing, that is, the kind of thing he is dealing with, and he must add the properties and causes that are related to that kind of thing. This is why Aristotle brought the doctrine of the categories which helps us to explain how we think about things. If for example we think of a distinct subject matter, we think of a subject and its predicates or of some substance and its accidents. If we think of the word "man" and connect it with predicates such as tall and able. The word "man" in this context is the substance. Substance itself can be considered a category. For Aristotle, these categories are used for classification of concepts that are used in scientific knowledge. They represent the specific ways in which whatever exists is realized. As human beings, when we think we arrange things into these ten categories which we mentioned earlier, classifying such categories into genera, species and also the species which are related to the genus. For Aristotle, these classifications are not just artificial creations of the mind but that they are actually in existence outside the mind and in things which falls into the classifications by their very nature and we think of their being members of a specie or genus because they exist.

For Aristotle, there is a close relationship between logic and metaphysics because, for him, thinking is connected with the way things are.

10.3 Aristotle on Metaphysics

Metaphysics or first philosophy is the science which deals with being as being of which is the most abstract of all ideas. Being on the other hand can be described as anything that exists or can exist in the mind. For Aristotle, “To be” means to be something or to be a particular kind of substance. “To be” could also mean a substance as the product of a dynamic process. This is the reason metaphysics is concerned with being, that is, existing substance and its causes or the processes by which substances come into being.

According to Aristotle, the major concern of metaphysics is the study of substance which is the essential nature of that thing. For example, the substance of a man is separate from the qualities of man; it does not mean that man is existing separately or differently from his qualities.

Aristotle on the Four Causes

In this world which we live, we see things changing constantly even though it one of the facts of life experiences. For Aristotle, change could mean many things such as motion, decay, corruption, growth. Some of these changes are natural while others are products of human creativity. When something is in a state of change it means that it is taking on a new form. With regards to the process of change, several questions can be asked, such as: what is it? What is it made of? By what is it made of? And then, for what purpose is it made? All these questions represent Aristotle’s four causes.

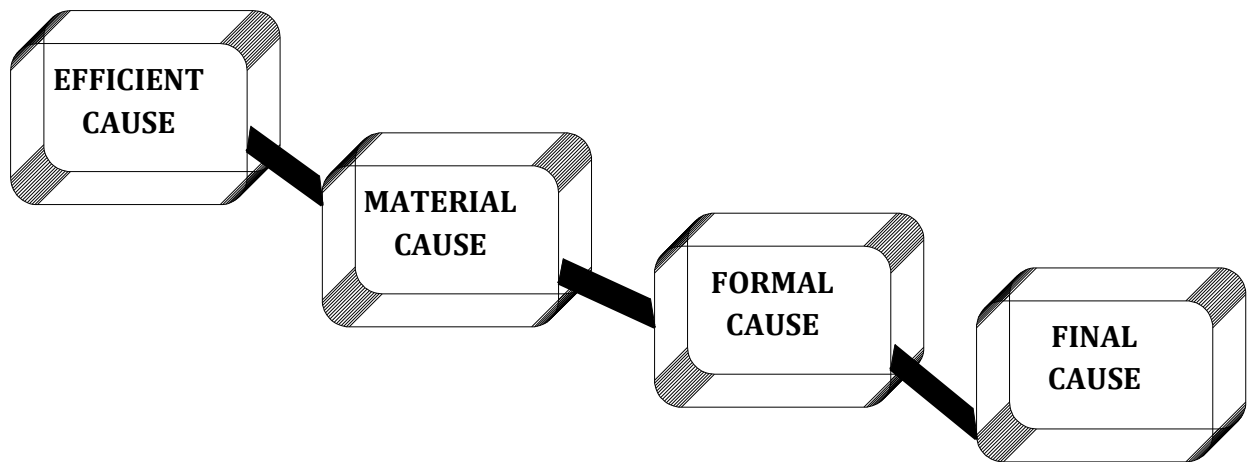
To understand a changing world, Aristotle says, we must understand the causes that operate in the world. According to Aristotle, four kinds of causes explain why a particular event happens or why something is the way it is. Since Aristotle uses the word cause in a much broader sense than we do today, these four causes may be best thought of as four different aspects that go into the explanation of any individual thing.

Activity 10.1

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far on Aristotle’s metaphysics. In order to clearly articulate the subject matter of Aristotle’s metaphysics, we have outlined the four causes which constitute the core of Aristotle’s metaphysics below:

ARISTOTLE’S FOUR CAUSES

Fig 10.1



Activity 10.1 Feedback:

Take a look at figure 10.1; it describes the constituent of Aristotle's four causes. This is further explained in what follows:

When talking about the cause of something, the first thing we may want to know about it maybe:

1. the material cause or its matter. For example, Aristotle says a hunk of bronze is the material cause of a statue. In the case of the Oak, the material cause is the organic material of the acorn. Next, we need to know
2. the efficient cause. This is the origin of the process that produced the article in question. In the case of the statue, this would be the sculptor and his tools. For the tree, the action of the moisture, the nurturing soil, and sunlight actualize the acorn's potential. Thus far, these two causes or modes of explanation seem roughly consistent with our modern scientific view of the world. We tend to think of nature as being made up of material objects being acted on by a set of forces.

For Aristotle, however, the most important part of the story is yet to be told. To explain something, we also need to know its

3. formal cause. This is the essence of the item, the form being actualized in its matter that which makes it the sort of thing it is. Thus, when the sculptor begins his work, he has the form in mind as he works with the bronze. The form at work in the acorn causes it to grow into a tree and not a tulip. For Aristotle, the most important aspect of something was
4. the final cause. This is the end or purpose or function it is to fulfil. For an artificial object such as a statue, its purpose may be to depict the likeness of someone. A natural object such as an acorn is a growing entity that points toward its fulfillment in the tree that bears its own acorns.

10.4 Aristotle on Ethics

Aristotle believed that man, as everything else in nature, has a function to fulfil. It is for this reason that his theory is rightly called teleological. In his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle made it very explicit that every action and pursuit is aimed at some good. What then is this good that the human being is aiming at? For Aristotle, what the human being is aiming at is happiness. Happiness is the main aim or the apex of morality. In other words, any action that leads to happiness is a good one, whereas the action that leads to unhappiness is an evil one. The view that holds that happiness is the standard of morality is known as eudemonism.

Aristotle defined “happiness” as the activity of the soul which is in accordance with virtue. There are two types of virtues, namely, the intellectual and moral virtues. The intellectual virtue comes as a result of teaching while the moral virtue is from the habit. This means that a good leader must show good example to his followers by leading a good life. Having said that all actions aim towards an end, Aristotle made a distinction between two ends, namely, the instrumental end and the intrinsic end. Instrumental end is defined as acts which are done as means for other ends. The intrinsic end is characterized by acts which are done for their own sake. Aristotle gave a good illustration of the bridle maker in order to explain these two types of ends: when a bridle maker completes his work on bridle making, the maker has achieved his end as a bridle maker. But the bridle itself is a means for the horseman in which the horseman guides his horse in the battle.

10.5 Aristotle on Politics

For Aristotle, man is by nature a political animal, and so man is intended by nature to live in a political society. The family is considered as the first in the order of time: it is built on the two fundamental relations of man and woman, master and slave, both of which are natural. When combined together, several families make a village, and several villages combine to make a state, and so the human society is fully developed. An individual cannot fulfil his purpose unless he is part of a state, and so the political society exists in order to serve man’s needs and provide for the individual the circumstances that will help him to develop and attain the purpose or goal of life which is happiness. Therefore, the state must be based on justice which is very essential to a state because it forms the basis of every political association and the right criterion for deciding what is just. For Aristotle, there is no need to own private properties or even to allow citizens to have their own private properties. If people or citizens must possess private goods, there should be certain limit and, they should be educated so that they would not desire to possess excessive private property and they should be told how to use their limited possessions for the common good.

One interesting thing in Aristotle’s philosophy is that the philosopher believed that slavery is justified because nature has made some people slaves and has also made some other people free men. As a result of this, Aristotle didn’t support the abolition of slavery. He also condemned the taking of any interest from loan and went ahead to condemn retail trades as unnatural. The legitimate ways to acquire wealth, according to Aristotle, is by labour and trade by barter.

Box 10.1: Aristotle on Politics

Aristotle political views majorly expressed the importance of man's interdependence and the need for social understanding in the formation and sustenance of a society. It is therefore important to note that:

- Aristotle believes that no man can survive by himself alone within the society.
- Aristotle considers a just state as the basis of any political association.
- However, his political philosophy was marred by the fact that he supported slavery.

Summary of Unit 10**In Unit 10, you have learned that:**

9. Aristotle is one of the greatest philosophers in the history of philosophy.
10. Having looked at the life of Aristotle and his philosophical activities, it is obvious that he was the first person to develop logic as an academic discipline.
11. In his metaphysics, he tried to explain how things exist using the four causes which are the formal cause, material cause, efficient cause and the final cause.
12. In his ethics, Aristotle made it clear that every human action is to aim at some good and this good is ultimate happiness.
13. In his political theory, Aristotle said that every human being is a political animal and that man should not isolate himself from the state. He also justified the distinction between the master and the slave saying that nature has made some people to be slaves while some people are by nature free men.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 10

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 10.1 (tests learning outcome 10.1)

Aristotle is believed to be one philosopher that immensely contributed to the development of logic. His most important contribution to logic is known as what?

SAQ 10.2 (tests learning outcome 10.2)

Aristotle's metaphysics is centered on what idea?

SAQ 10.3 (tests learning outcome 10.3)

What, for Aristotle, is the central goal of Ethics?

SAQ 10.4 (tests learning outcome 10.4)

How would you describe Aristotle's understanding of political society?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 10

SAQ 10.1: The doctrine of syllogism is the most important work of Aristotle.

SAQ 10.2: It is centered on the idea of the four causes (material, efficient, formal and final cause).

SAQ 10.3: Aristotle is of the opinion that Ethics should help human beings to aim for the good; the good is when human actions lead to happiness.

SAQ 10.4: Aristotle's considers the family as the foundation for the formation of any political society. Meanwhile, a group of families makes a village, while the combination of villages forms a society.

Unit 11 Epicureanism

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you will learn about Epicurus was the founder of Epicureanism. He was born at Samos and lived between 341 – 270 B.C. History has it that he was born seven years after Plato's death and established his school in a garden in Athens. This is why his school was referred to as "The Garden" and the school attracted many followers who sometimes regarded Epicurus as a god. The school was also open to people of all walks of life – men and women, children, slaves, soldier and prominent citizens.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 11

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

11.1 State the motive of the epicurean philosophy (SAQ 11.1)

11.2 Describe the main concern of Epicurus Philosophy (SAQ 11.2)

11.3 State the Epicurean view on the phenomenon of death (SAQ 11.3)

11.1 The Philosophical Doctrines of Epicurus

Epicurus treated his followers with great affection and this made them to be deeply devoted to him. After his death, his followers showed their deep devotion to him by holding a monthly feast in his memory and yearly celebration of his birthday. Epicureanism proved a very attractive philosophy and was extremely influential in Greece and the Roman world.

According to Epicurus, the whole point of philosophy is to heal the soul and enable us to live a happy life. This is the reason why he didn't give much regard to theoretical speculations in both philosophy and the sciences. He believed that any theoretical speculations that fail to serves practical human needs should be disregarded.

Like Democritus, the Epicureans believed that everything results from a combination of atoms. Atoms are eternal, indivisible, infinite in number, different in size, shape and weights. The Epicureans therefore believed that there are many worlds. They also explained that the soul of man consists of atoms, but they are made of a more subtle matter, which is the reason why the soul has the capacity to perceive.

The main concern of the Epicureans was peace of mind. Epicurus taught his followers that the pursuit of pleasure and the delights of the senses were natural though he warned his followers not to promote these as the purpose of life. Epicurus' main concern was to free man from anxiety so that they will have everlasting tranquility which he called "ataraxia". According to Epicurus, the wise man would have nothing to fear from life even in worst situations. He claimed that a wise man could be happy even under torture –that pain never lasts forever.

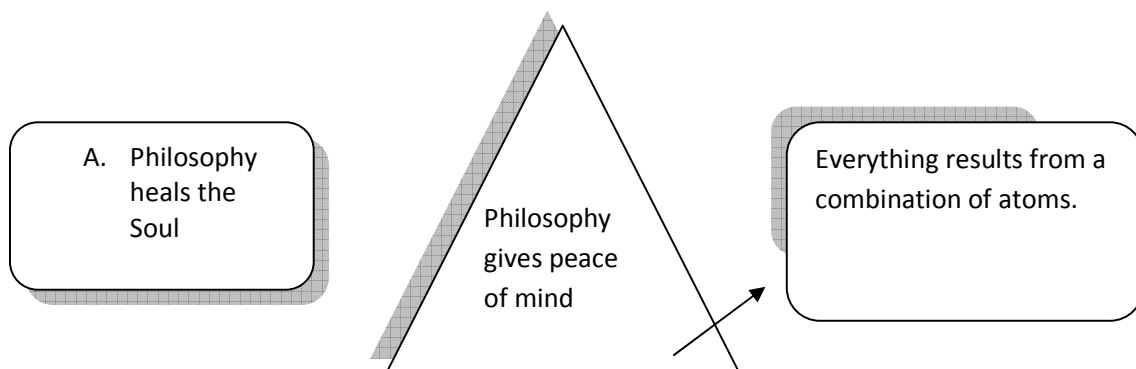
The Epicureans believed that death is utterly nothing, but the separation of the atoms that make up our bodies. At death the atoms, which make up the soul, break up and perception is lost. The human soul is not immortal. As such, death is not to be feared since it is the end of sensibility and consequently of pain. Epicurus taught that the gods are not concerned with us at all and that we should not have anxieties about being judged and punished by them. Here, we should note that the point of the Epicurean teaching about the gods is to assure us that the gods are too preoccupied with their own pleasure to bother themselves with the problems of this world or to cause trouble for us.

Another important point in Epicurean philosophy is the view that virtue is valuable only for its egoistic consequence. In other words, the Epicureans believed that we are to be virtuous because being virtuous makes life more pleasant and it is to our advantage. One should be virtuous just only to avoid the consequences of one's evils actions being exposed.

Epicurus also contributed to social philosophy, though this may not be compared to what philosophers like Plato and Aristotle did in this area. According to Epicurus, civil laws are based on human conventions and should be obeyed only because this will make our lives more peaceful. However, he cautioned us against involvement in politics, arguing that such involvement only burdens us with responsibilities, creates enemies, and leads to personal unrest. In fact, he believed that the wise must free themselves from the prison of politics and advised that "the purest security is that which comes from a quiet life and withdrawal from the many".

Activity 11.1

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Based on your learning experience, and knowing that Epicurus expressed various philosophical doctrines, note down some of the key ideas in his philosophical thoughts.



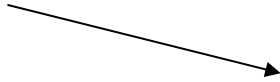


Fig 11.1

Activity 11.1 Feedback:

Take a look at figure 1.1; it describes the various dimensions of Epicurus' philosophical thoughts.

Box 11.1: The Philosophical Doctrines of Epicurus

As it is the norm for most ancient philosophers to say something about the primary constituents of things within the universe,

It is important to note that:

- Atoms are the basic constituents of things within the universe.

Summary of Unit 11

In Unit 11, you have learned that:

1. The whole point of philosophy is to serve practical human needs.

2. There is no benefit in philosophy if it fails to make us happy by getting rid of the psychological turmoil that robs us of a happy life.
3. Epicurean philosophy also identifies the notions of good and evil with pleasure and pain.
4. The Epicurean claim is that only pleasure is good.
5. On death, Epicureanism offers us peace of mind with the following argument: if we exist, then death does not; and if death exists, then we do not. In either case we will never literally experience death, for death is simply the moment when the soul atoms disperse into the air with our last breath and our ability to experience pain or anguish ceases.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 11

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 11.1 (tests learning outcome 11.1)

What did Epicurus consider as the purpose of doing philosophy?

SAQ 11.2 (tests learning outcome 11.2)

What is the main concern of Epicurus' philosophy?

SAQ 11.3 (tests learning outcome 11.3)

How does Epicurus view death?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 11

SAQ 11.1: It is to enable us to live a happy life

SAQ 11.2: Main concern of the Epicurean philosophy was peace of mind.

SAQ 11.3: The Epicureans believed that death is utterly nothing.

Unit 12 The Stoics

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you will learn about Stoicism. Stoicism was founded by Zeno who lived about 336 to 264 B.C. But this philosopher should not be confused with Zeno, the pupil of Parmenides. He left his native city of Citium in Cyprus and came to Athens where he founded a school. He lectured on a porch or open colonnade. His philosophical teachings drew many Greeks and Romans to his school and the Athenians also gave him many official honours because he was widely admired for his earnestness.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 12

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

12.1 Define what Stoicism is (SAQ 12.1)

12.2 State the difference in the philosophical views of the Stoics and the Epicureans (SAQ 12.2)

12.3 Describe the focus of Stoic Ethics (SAQ 12.3).

12.1 Stoicism as a Philosophical School of Thought

The term “stoicism” is derived from the Greek word “Stoa” referring to a colonnade (a series of trees planted in a long row, as on each side of a driveway or road). Stoicism is essentially a system of ethics which, however, is guided by logic and reason. Also, it is popularly believed that their notion of morality is stern, involving a life in accordance with nature controlled by virtue.

In discussing the philosophical views of the Stoics, it is important to first of all compare and contrast the Stoics with the Epicureans. The reason for this is not far-fetched: Stoicism developed about the same time that Epicurus founded his school. Besides this, Stoicism developed into a formidable rival that competed with most of the teachings of Epicurus concerning the relevance of philosophy to human needs.

The Epicureans and the Stoics had a great deal in common. Firstly, the two schools were both concerned with logic and physics, but emphasized the relevance of these fields to practical ethics; secondly, both were materialistic in their metaphysics, and empiricists in their epistemology or issues relating to knowledge; and thirdly, they both advised us to act according to nature. But we should note here that the two schools had different conceptions of the cosmos and the human nature. For instance, the Epicureans believed that the universe was mechanistic and governed by chance. For the stoics,

however, the universe was purposeful and governed by a benevolent, divine plan. According to the Epicureans, humans pursue the highest good which is pleasure. This means that virtue has value only if it gives us pleasure in the end. But the Stoics followed Socrates' teaching by maintaining that no real harm can come to a person, whose life is based, on virtue and eternal values. In this way, they upheld the view that character, virtue, self-discipline and the fulfilment of duty have value in themselves.

- A friend of yours is an atheist. She doesn't believe that the world and human beings were created by God. She simply believes that everything in the universe including man is a product of natural evolution. Now if you are asked to place her world-view into a philosophical school of thought, how would you describe her views?
- She is Epicurean in her philosophical views because she does not see the universe and man as a creation of the divine rather as a natural creation.

The Stoics believed that all knowledge is derived from perception. This means that, for them there is no innate knowledge because the soul at birth is blank like a plain sheet. Thus, man acquires knowledge through sense perception. While Plato rejected sense perception as the source of true knowledge, the stoics give primacy to knowledge derived from sense perception. The stoics can be regarded as empiricists, though they aren't consistent empiricists; they also hold the rationalist view of knowledge by claiming that reason develops out of perception. In this way, the Stoics suggested that the criterion of truth lies in the perception.

Like the Epicureans, the Stoics believed that all reality is material. For this reason, their philosophy is said to be materialistic monism. This view allowed them to conclude that God and the human soul, as well as all other forms and forces in the universe, are materials. Thus, the universe, according to the Stoics, was teleological, (that is, designed with a purpose) and permeated by the divine. Unlike Aristotle and Epicurus whose god was impersonal and uncaring, the Stoic divinity was just and benevolent. This answers why they are of the view that this divinity (God) guides all things by his wisdom to realize the perfect and good outcome. They shared Heraclitus view that God is the *Logos*, or the rational principle pervading everything.

12.2 Stoic Ethics

The Stoics' ethics is in agreement with Aristotle's claim that the highest good for human beings is a life lived according to reason. They maintained that the purpose of life is happiness but the way to it is to follow nature. For them, to live according to nature is virtue and to live contrary to nature is vice. According to the Stoics, virtue is the sole good in the life of an individual. They advised that the individual should achieve rational control over his life and should be free from all passion. Man should live a rationally self-determined life and should tie his happiness only to what he can control. According to these philosophers, the search for such things as fame, wealth, pleasure, love doesn't make sense because this search often puts external events in control of our happiness. This search is even useless

because every event in the universe is determined and this points to the fact that man cannot change the inevitable. Therefore, they advised man to welcome every event as the expression of God's will and as an essential part of the harmonious, beautiful scheme of things.

Activity 12.1

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Based on your learning experience, and knowing that Stoic Ethics emphasize a life lived according to dictate of nature, see the figure below for such illustration:

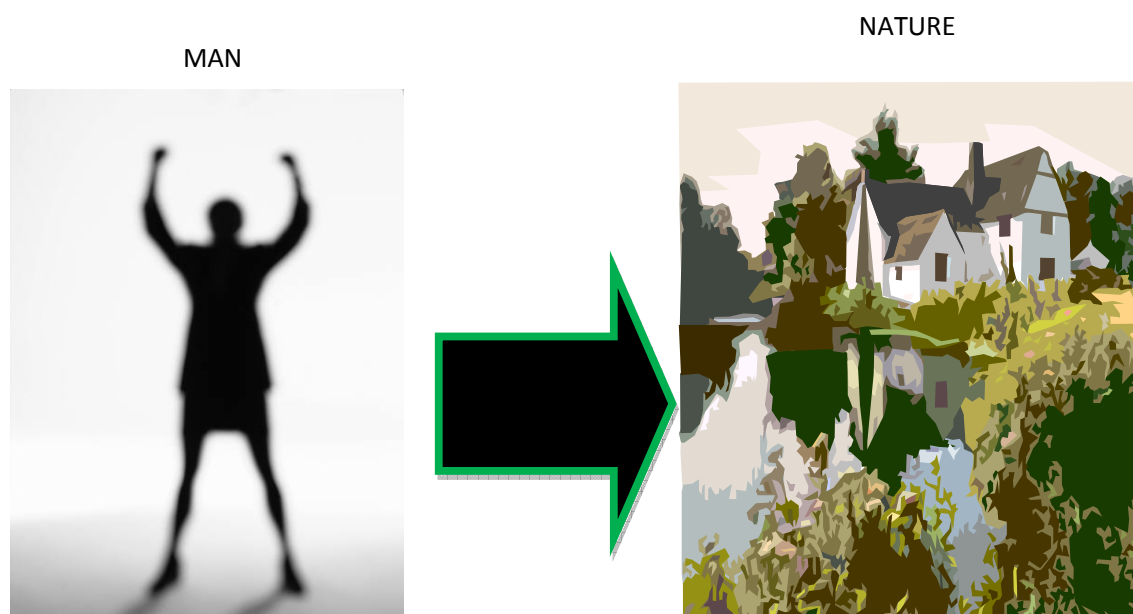


Fig 12.1

Activity 12.1 Feedback:

Take a look at figure 12.1; it describes the ethical view of the stoics which insists that human life should be lived according to the dictates of nature.

Box 12.1: Stoic Ethics

Generally speaking, ethics is that aspect of philosophy that aims to evaluate human conducts based on certain principles in order to determine their moral value.

In this case, it is important to note that:

Summary of Unit 12

In Unit 12, you have learned that:

1. The philosophical ideal of the Stoics could be summarized as “indifference” or apathy. Thus, they rejected human vanity and pride.
2. They taught that anger is pointless and can only be self-destructive, that love and even friendship can be dangerous.
3. For the Stoics, the wise man forms only limited attachments and shouldn’t be afraid of tragedy or death. Thus, the Stoics taught that death belongs to the cosmic order of things as birth is; if this be case, then there is actually no ground for fear or complaint.
4. Human beings should live according to the rules of reason.
5. The Stoics are of the view that all human knowledge is essentially perceptual.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 12

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 12.1 (tests learning outcome 12.1)

What is Stoicism?

SAQ 12.2 (tests learning outcome 12.2)

How can you differentiate between the philosophical views of the Stoics and Epicureans?

SAQ 12.3 (tests learning outcome 12.3)

What is the focus of Stoic Ethics?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 12

SAQ 12.1: Stoicism is a philosophical system that emphasizes the virtue as the basis for human life and it upholds a system of ethics guided by reason and logic.

SAQ 12.2: The Epicureans believed that the universe was mechanistic and governed by chance while the stoics, on the other hand, believe that the universe was purposeful and governed by a benevolent, divine plan.

SAQ 12.3: It is to stress the fact that the purpose of life is happiness and the way to achieve it, is to follow nature.

Unit 13 The Sceptics

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study session you will learn about the Sceptics. The term “Sceptic” comes from the Greek word *skeptikos*, which means “inquirers”. The sceptics are adherents of the school of thought known as scepticism. Generally speaking, a sceptic is someone who doubts the certainty or the possibility of knowledge. The first group of philosophers who practised this form of philosophy were the Sophists, notably Protagoras and Gorgias. As a matter of fact, sceptical thought had been around since the time of the sophists and was a prominent part of the Sophists’ teachings.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 13

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 13.1 Define who a sceptic is. (SAQs 13.1, 13.2)
- 13.2 State the Arguments of the Sceptics (SAQ 13.3)
- 13.3 State the difference between positive and negative scepticism (SAQ 13.4)

13.1 On the beginning of Scepticism

13.1.1 The Sceptical Philosophy of Pyrrho, Aenesidemus and Sextus Empiricus

Pyrrho of Elis is regarded as the founder of a Sceptic school at the beginning but the school didn’t function throughout the Hellenistic era. Pyrrho lived between 360 and 270 B.C and was a soldier in Alexander’s army. Pyrrho never wrote anything. In the beginning, Pyrrhonism was a synonym for scepticism.

Another Sceptic was Aenesidemus of Knossos. Aenesidemus was the philosopher who first revived this school of thought after Pyrrho. The school was once again revived by Sextus Empiricus toward the middle of the second century A.D. Sextus Empiricus was a Roman, although he wrote in Greek. He was a physician whose main goal was to cure man of the mental disease of wanting to attain certainty. According to him, men should abstain from judgments and obey instead their feelings and laws and customs of their society. He claimed that if someone tries to prove everything, he must ultimately either base this proof on unproven principles or fall into a circular argument where one point both proves another and is proven by it.

- In life, sometimes we find ourselves exhibiting doubt on a number of issues. If you are one of those that believe that God exists and a friend of yours exhibits doubt about this belief of yours asking you to provide evidence or foundational principles for your belief, how would you describe this friend of yours?
 - This friend of yours will simply be described as a sceptic because he raises doubt about your belief or view point. A sceptic often questions the grounds for which people holds different beliefs and world-views.

13.2. Sceptical Arguments

Now let us look at the arguments of the sceptics:

1. Argument against Sense Experience

The sceptics have argued that the source of most knowledge which is sense experience is prone to error. Experience has revealed that our senses sometimes are deceitful and unreliable. Even if we want to rely on our sense experience for knowledge, can they be relied upon as the source of all knowledge?

2. Argument against Theoretical Knowledge

According to some sceptics, the knowledge from abstract entities, the type we have in mathematics, can also be doubted because we often make mistakes about the simplest deductive and mathematical inferences.

3. Argument about Actual Experience and State of Dream

Some sceptics argue that since it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between reality and state of dream, it is then sensible to regard all our experiences as a dream from which we can wake up one day. They argue that our actual experiences can later turn out to be a dream since we often confuse our dreams with reality. They conclude by saying that knowledge from actual experience should not be taken as absolutely certain.

4. “Evil Genius” Argument

The sceptic could also argue that it is possible that we are being constantly deceived by an “evil genius” in our bid to acquire knowledge such that all the knowledge we claim to have comes from this evil spirit who desires to deceive us. If this is possible then all our knowledge claims are unreliable.

From these arguments we can infer that scepticism is a doctrine or an orientation that challenges all our knowledge claims by providing arguments and reasons why those claims should be doubted. However, we have two types of scepticism namely, Positive mild scepticism and Negative universal scepticism. **Positive Mild Scepticism** is a desirable type of scepticism in the enterprise of epistemology because it encourages the desire to question the naïve realism of ordinary life. Its aim is not to deny knowledge but to raise the standard and quality of our knowledge claims. **Negative Universal**

Scepticism is a total denial of certainty. It is the dogmatic or pessimistic refusal to accept any knowledge claim as certain. It does not spare any sort or form of knowledge and so creates despair and frustration in the enterprise of epistemology.

Box 13.1: The Sceptical Arguments

Although scepticism is the philosophical attitude that raises doubt about human knowledge, this does not mean that all sceptics are univocal in their views.

It is important to note that:

- The sceptical arguments are evidence of the different views of the sceptics in the history of philosophy.

Summary of Unit 13

In Unit 13, you have learned that:

1. Scepticism is a very important term in epistemology, a branch of philosophy.
2. In both the ordinary and philosophical senses, a sceptic is one who, at least unless he is shown satisfactory reason for accepting a claim as knowledge, doubts every knowledge claim. He asks for the justification of our knowledge claim.
3. The sceptics did contribute to philosophy.
4. In fact scepticism of all varieties makes philosophy self-critical and keeps it free of dogmatism.
5. Scepticism as an ideal, therefore, connotes the critical spirit.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 13

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 13.1 (tests learning outcome 13.1)

Who is a Sceptic?

SAQ 13.2 (tests learning outcome 13.2)

Who are the sets of philosophers that practiced scepticism?

SAQ 13.3 (tests learning outcome 13.3)

What are the sceptical arguments you are familiar with?

SAQ 13.4 (tests learning outcome 13.4)

How would you distinguish between positive and negative scepticism?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 1

SAQ 13.1: A sceptic is someone who raises critical questions about the possibility of knowledge.

SAQ 13.2: They are known as Sophists.

SAQ 13.3: They include: arguments against sense experience, theoretical knowledge, arguments about actual experience and state of dream and the evil genius argument.

SAQ 13.4: Positive scepticism is a form of doubt that seeks to raise the standard of knowledge while negative scepticism is the total denial of certainty or knowledge.

Unit 14 Plotinus

Expected duration: 1 week or 2 contact hours

Introduction

In this study, you will learn about Plotinus. Plotinus was born in Egypt around 205 – 270 A.D. and is often regarded as the founder of Neoplatonism. He is also regarded as the last of the great philosophers in antiquity. As a young man, he studied philosophy in Alexandria where he lived until the age of thirty-nine. At the age of forty, he made his way to Rome where he opened a school and taught philosophy until his death in 270 A.D. During his lifetime, he was known as a spiritual counsellor and was respected by many people because of his gentle and affectionate spirit. Because he didn't want his people to worship him as god, Plotinus refused to disclose his birthday, but invited his friends to celebrations on the birthdays of Socrates and Plato. He showed great affection for orphaned children and took care of these children as their guardian.

Learning Outcomes for Unit 14

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 14.1 State why Plotinus is regarded as a neoplatonist (SAQs 14.1, 14.2)
- 14.2 Describe Plotinus' idea of "the One" (SAQ 14.3)
- 14.3 State how Plotinus addresses the problem of evil (SAQ 14.4)
- 14.4 Describe Plotinus' view on how we can achieve perfect happiness (SAQ 14.5)

14.1 The Philosophy of Plotinus

14.1.1 The Metaphysics of Plotinus

He wrote many manuscripts on his philosophical teachings. These manuscripts were later edited and arranged by Porphyry, his faithful disciple. Porphyry divided his master's writing into six groups of nine, collectively called the *Enneads*. For Plotinus, the highest being is "the One". "The One" is beyond all thought and incomprehensible. Plotinus uses numerous names to refer to the One, such as God, the Good, First Existent, the Absolute, the Infinite and the Father. The One is outside the realm of time, having no past or future. The One is both self-caused and the cause of being for everything else in the

universe. In other words, Plotinus believes that everything emanates from the One, while the One itself remains the same.

In Plotinus' metaphysics, the first emanation from the One is called *Nous*, which can be translated as Intellect, Intellect Principle, Divine Mind, or Spirit. The *Nous* is, like the One, eternal and beyond time. It is like the image of the One. Plotinus borrows the metaphor of the sun from Plato to illustrate this. The sun sheds its light on all things but remains undiminished in the process. Similarly, an object may have its image replaced in a mirror while being unaffected by this duplication.

Plotinus believed that the soul is eternal and nonphysical and that the soul mediates between the spiritual realm and the physical realm which is the world of the senses. For Plotinus, the soul has two aspects, namely, the higher part and the lower part. The higher part of the soul remains untouched by what is beneath it, while the lower part represents the world of physical beings. He explained that the soul survives the death of the body and is reincarnated, but doesn't retain its memories.

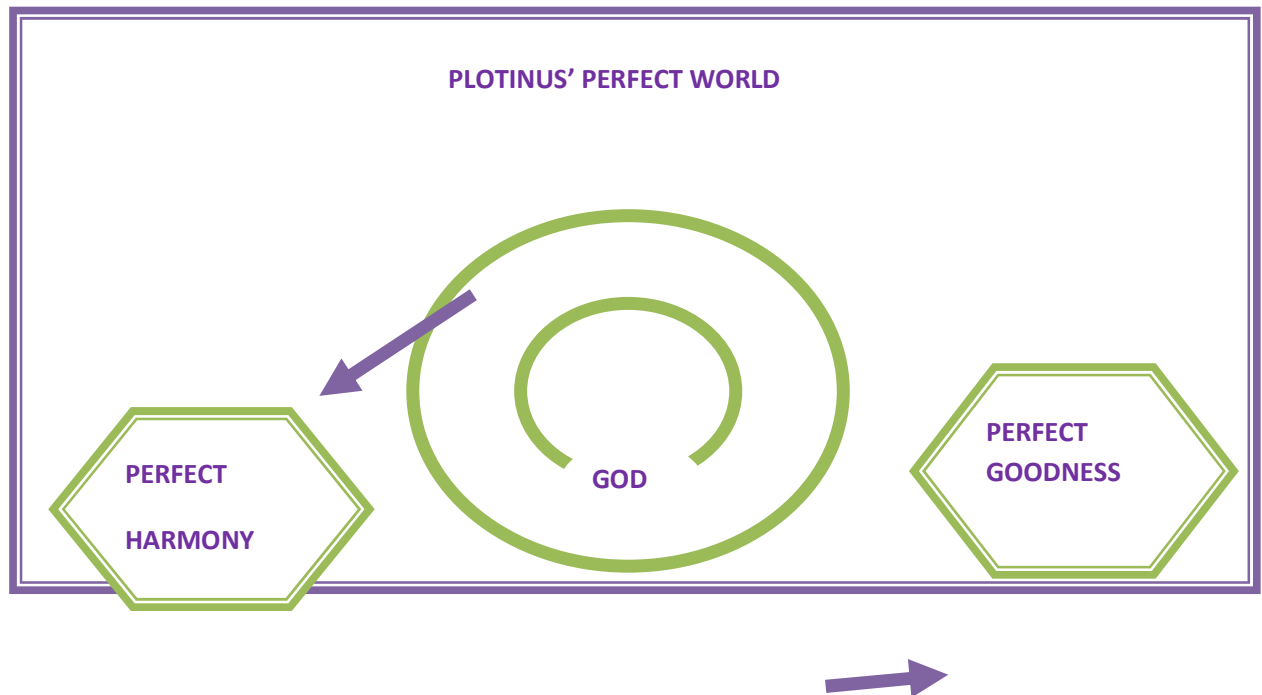
- In most Traditional African societies people believe in reincarnation, especially as it pertains to those elders who lived an exemplary and morally worthy life. It is believed that the souls of such persons can reincarnate and come in a new body maybe in form of a new born baby. That is why there are such names like: Babatunde, Iyabo, Babawande, Atunbi, etc among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. If you are asked to explain Plotinus philosophy on the human soul and reincarnation in relation to African cultural beliefs, how would you respond?
- Plotinus, in his metaphysics advocates the doctrine of reincarnation whereby the soul is believed to survive the death of the body it occupies the higher aspect of the human constitutive elements. This is similar and consistent with most Africans' belief in the possibility of a life after death.

14.2 Plotinus on the Problem of Evil

Plotinus also discussed issues related to the problem of evil. In this regard, he had a pessimistic view of matter because he suggested that the production of the physical world is a mistake. However, he maintained again that the physical realm emanated from the source of all goodness, God, and therefore anything short of God necessarily falls short of his perfect goodness. Thus, for Plotinus, evil doesn't exist for the perfect soul; it exists only for those who turn away from God. It exists for those souls who are blinded by their passions and seduced by material world. In other words, we can only experience perfect peace and happiness if we ignore the seduction of the body which will allow us to have an ecstatic union with God.

Activity 14.1

Take a moment to reflect on what you have read so far. Based on your learning experience especially on the problem of evil as discussed by Plotinus, note down some of the key notions which encompasses his thought on this issue:



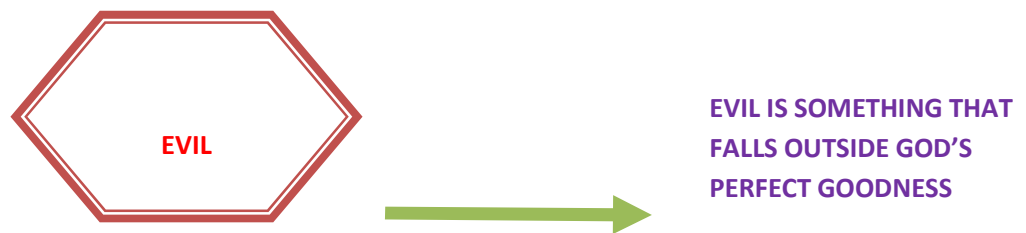


Fig. 14.1

Activity 14.1 Feedback:

Take a look at figure 14.1; it describes vividly how Plotinus' attempts to tackle the problem of evil; branding it as something which exists outside of the goodness of God's essence.

Box 14.1: Plotinus on the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil in philosophy is a difficult one that has occupied the mind of scholars through the history of philosophy. However, it is important to note that:

- Unlike most philosophers, Plotinus did not attempt to evade the problem. He confronted the problem and tried to address it.
- In a bid to address the problem of evil, Plotinus argued that there is nothing evil in the nature of God; that is, in the nature of God lies perfect goodness. However, he believes

Summary of Unit 14

In Unit 14, you have learned that:

1. Plotinus didn't develop his philosophy simply to obtain metaphysical knowledge for its own sake, but to show the way to salvation, which rests on the idea of God's perfect goodness.
2. Plotinus was a very dutiful apostle of Plato.
3. Plotinus' philosophy conveys a simple and remarkably positive spiritual message which emphasises that the human soul is already in some sense divine and even the material world of everyday life is spiritual.
4. The ground for all creation is what Plotinus refers to as "the One" which he likened to God.
5. Plotinus notion of the human person is dualistic because it distinguishes between the physical and non-physical aspects of man.
6. We can deduce from Plotinus philosophy that evil is not a reality that pulls us down; it is our own wilfulness that turns us away from the Good.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 14

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 14.1 (tests learning outcome 14.1)

Why is Plotinus considered to be Neoplatonist in his philosophical orientation?

SAQ 14.2 (tests learning outcome 14.2)

What metaphor did Plotinus borrow from Plato to express his ideas?

SAQ 14.3 (tests learning outcome 14.3)

What does Plotinus refer to as “the One”?

SAQ 14.4 (tests learning outcome 14.4)

In what way did Plotinus attempt to address the problem of evil?

SAQ 14.5 (tests learning outcome 14.5)

How can human beings achieve perfect happiness, according to Plotinus?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Unit 14

SAQ 14.1: Most of his philosophical thoughts are related to that of Plato.

SAQ 14.2: The metaphor of the sun

SAQ 14.3: For Plotinus, “the One” is the highest being; a being that is beyond all thought and human comprehension.

SAQ 14.4: He attempted to address this problem by claiming that evil doesn’t exist for the perfect soul; it exists only for those who turn away from God.

SAQ 14.5: For Plotinus, human beings can only experience perfect and happiness if they can ignore the seduction of the body which prevents them from having a pure union with God.

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