



Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Inter-disciplinary and
Trans-disciplinary Studies

BPYC-101

Block V

GREEK PHILOSOPHY: EARLY PHILOSOPHERS

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

It is interesting to go through the history of Greek philosophy which gives us answers to many problems which arise in the life of ordinary humans. The Greeks in general were lovers of wisdom. Many early Greek philosophers criticized myths that gave importance to gods who were subjected to fate. They evolved a rational way of thinking of truth and reality. In fact, they laid the foundations for further development of western philosophy that has predominantly taken the path of rationality. The spirit of independence and the love of truth are the visible characteristics of their thought.

Unit 15 studies “Ionian and Pythagorean Philosophers.” They enquired into the origin of things and the mysteries of universe. They were concerned about two problems: the ultimate principle of all things and the problem of substance. The second problem is related to the problem of change and permanence; the Ionian philosophers thought that, in spite of all these changes and transitions, there must be something permanent.

Unit 16 explains the philosophies of “Eleatic and Atomistic Philosophers.” The Eleatic and the Atomist philosophical thoughts made the ancient Greek philosophy very attractive and rich. Both schools tried to find out the Ultimate Cause which rules over the universe. The Atomists say that the universe is formed out of small invisible and physically indivisible particles called ‘Atoms,’ which are eternal and immutable.

Unit 17 on “Sophistic Philosophers” explores problems of knowledge and conduct rather than the structure of the universe or the ultimate constituents of reality. Their acquaintance with the earlier philosophers had convinced them that it was impossible to attain certain knowledge of external reality, that human reason could not solve the riddle of the universe. Thus, the unit highlights how the Sophist thought concerns itself with certain basic questions in ethics and epistemology. This represents a major shift of philosophical interest from the problems of nature to the problems of human.

Unit 18 on “Socrates” demonstrates how Socrates’ opposition to the blind acceptance of tradition and authority allied him with the Sophists such as Protagoras, Gorgias and Prodicus.

However, he was far more committed to know the inner person than the Sophists. Unlike the Sophists, he was in search of truth and knowledge of the universal validity of moral laws. For him this search was intimately connected with the chief problem of knowing what human is. This Unit explains the basic philosophy of Socrates: Socratic problem, Socratic method, epistemology, ethics, and Socratic schools of thought.

These 4 units will give you an introduction to early Greek philosophers who not only laid the foundations for later Greek philosophers but also anticipated in their debates several issues with which European civilization occupied itself for more than two thousand years. As you study these philosophers you will come to know that their philosophy is one of the best examples of the evolution of human thinking from simple mythological beginnings to complex and comprehensive systems.

UNIT 15 IONIAN AND PYTHAGOREAN PHILOSOPHERS*

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Thales
- 15.3 Anaximander
- 15.4 Anaximanes
- 15.5 Pythagoras
- 15.6 Heraclitus
- 15.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.8 Key Words
- 15.9 Further Readings and References
- 15.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

15.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we introduce the origin and development of Greek philosophy, its history and its philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximanes, Pythagoras and Heraclitus with their philosophical insights on God, world and human beings. Most of these philosophers belonged to the Ionian School active at Miletus (hence some of them are also called Milesian thinkers). In the process we will be touching upon various issues of ordinary life, helping one to have a better view on the world experience.

By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- Begin philosophizing with awe and wonder;
- Look at various issues of life, such as moral, social, religious and political with a philosophical bend of mind;
- Follow the style of Greek thinking; and
- Explain 'the ultimate principle' proposed by the Ancient Greek Philosophers.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

The Greeks in general were philosophers, because they were lovers of wisdom. 'Lovers of wisdom' means that those who have the real thirst for knowledge. The word 'philosophy' itself is coming from the Greek language. The Greek word "*Philo-Sophia*" means love of wisdom. Philosophy should always aim at the wisdom which spreads light on the supreme cause. This supreme cause is what is called in Greek "*arche*". This principle is not equal to the phenomena of direct experience such as water, air, and fire as they are manifested in the world of senses: rain, wind, flames, sun, day, night, etc. The sense experience appeared as wonders in their life. Behind these wonders, a cause was sought. The external nature of the

* Dr. Loser Kuttikal, Prostaya Vidyapith, Kottiyam. This unit is taken from BPY-003 (Unit 1 Block 2).

universe was considered in the Ionian Period as the first great problem. The enquiry into this problem was dynamic from about 585 to the middle of the 5th century B.C. The first stage in the growth of Greek philosophy was naturalistic: its efforts were oriented to the nature, with the nature, by the nature and in the nature. They were much impressed by the fact of birth, growth, decay and death. It was a search for knowledge for its own sake. The origin of things and the mysteries of universe were the central points. It was a cosmological problem. It was concerned mainly with two problems: what is the basic substance of the universe? And from where do they originate?

15.2 THALES (624-548 BC)

The historian Herodotus, who used for the first time the Greek-term 'philo-sophia,' told that Thales was one of the seven sages: Thales, Biantes, Pittacus, Solon, Cleobule, Mison and Chilon. Aristotle has generally used this name 'sage' for philosophers and he particularly called Thales an "Initiator of Philosophy". The "sophia" of seven sages was merely a moral knowledge or practical righteousness.

Thales, who has fame as the first Ionian philosopher, flourished at Miletus a Greek colony in Asia Minor. This city is now in modern Turkey. At the time of Thales it was a Greek city. He might have done his studies with Egyptian or Babylonian teachers. Miletus had colonies at this time in Egypt.

We do not know much about the life of Thales. Even the dates of his birth and death are uncertain. He was born about 624 B.C. He travelled to Egypt, and visited great centres of Lydia, a powerful kingdom then allied with Miletus and all Ionia. He is the first philosopher of Greece. He was named as statesman, mathematician, and astronomer. It was Thales who told the eclipse, which happened on May 28th, 585 B.C. Thales died in 548 BC.

Thales was also an important mathematician. And he was able to prove several interesting mathematical ideas. He measured the height of a pyramid by calculating the shadow of his own, when his own shadow became the same length of his height. Thales confirmed that

- A circle is bisected by its diameter
- The angles at the bases of any isosceles triangle are equal
- If two straight lines cut one another, the opposite angles are equal.
- If two triangles have two angles and a side in common, the triangles are identical.

His question was about the basic stuff of the universe. He searched for the cause of the universe. According to him, water was the original stuff. He would have been led by myth of oceans and Tethy's gods of ocean. Water has the potency to become solid, liquid and vaporous forms. Water evaporates in the heat of the sun, and according to Thales it is the transformation of water into fire. Water comes down again in the form of rain and it is transformed into earth. Water is essential to life. The reason is that nourishment, seed, and heat which are essential to life, contain moisture or wet. Hence water is the primordial principle, and all things (*physis*) were water (*arche*) and are water (*physis*). The earth is a flat disc floating on water. Water is the material cause of all things. He clearly perceived that nature was alive.

His claim involves three vital assumptions. He wanted to assert his belief that the universe is made up of One thing, i.e., water. Indeed, he brought the question of One:

- He believed that the fundamental explanation of the universe must be one in number. There can not be two realities behind the mysteries of the universe. The controlling element of the Nature should be one.
- This one reality must be a 'thing'. It ought to be a definite thing; and this thing is

water which has the capacity to be present in everything.

- And this one 'thing' must have within itself the ability to move and change.

15.2.1 Metaphysical Problem and Solution

From this thinking he comes to the metaphysical problem of "the One and the many". How the multiplicity (*physis*) of beings can be explained in a unity (*arche*), a unique principle? How does Thales explain the term multiplicity? For philosophical understanding, we have to see beings as a whole. This whole is not to be understood as a sum of non-living things lacking movement, but this whole has its life as a single reality. Things have their own lives. Life is the element that brings the unity among all these multiplicity. This is an animistic vision of reality. Therefore, Aristotle quotes of Thales in '*De Anima*', "all things are full of gods" and hence the "*physis*" is something divine (*theion*) both in its being and in its change. What we have is only a first reflection, but that is full of philosophical implications.

He believed that 'All things are full of gods'. Perhaps, he might have thought that the universe is full with small invisible seeds for life. He saw that soon after the first rain after summer the earth began to bring new lives forth. Water may be the primordial stuff or the first cause for all lives in the earth. It can transform itself from one form to another form: solid, soft and again unseen like vapor. When he speaks that water is the '*arche*' of the universe, he does not mean that this '*arche*' is the beginning, but this is the sustaining Principle or material cause. He said already that this '*arche*' is a thing, from that we can guess that this is not god. This water is wet as ultimate reality.

15.3 ANAXIMANDER (614-540 BC)

He was a disciple of Thales lived around 614-540 B.C. He participated in political life. He travelled to Sparta to construct sundial. For the Milesian sailors in Black Sea he designed a map. He says that the earth is a cylindrical body and is in the centre of the universe. It is not supported by anything but held in the equilibrium by other bodies. These things show his interest in scientific matters.

He sought like Thales for the primary principle and the ultimate end of all things, but he decided that it could not be any particular kind of matter such as water. If change, birth, growth and decay are due to conflict, on the supposition that everything in reality is water, why not in water all other things are absorbed? Therefore, he came to an idea that the primordial stuff is indeterminate. He named this as the material cause. It is different from water or any such kind of things and which is infinite. From this indeterminate cause emerged all the heavens and the earth. It is "Ageless and Eternal"

This principle consists of and controls all elements, like the water, the earth and the fire; but it is not confused with these same elements. This primordial principle, called in Greek *apeiron*, will be divine, immobile, not generated, immutable, venerable, an absolute justice. This is the reality behind all cause and effect.

15.3.1 Merits of Teaching

1. The primordial stuff, according to Anaximander, is a derivative element from 'water' of Thales.
2. Here the thought of Anaximander has a stage of process of becoming.
3. He thinks of a primordial stuff, which is indestructible.
4. He refuses to tell the qualities of primordial stuff; because of its complexity.
5. Therefore this refusal shows the abstract mode of his thought, by proposing 'Indefinite Principle'.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for the answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is the basic stuff and cause of the universe according to Thales?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What is the basic philosophy of Anaximander?

.....

.....

.....

.....

15.4 ANAXIMANES (600 BC)

The third philosopher of the Milesian school was Anaximanes. He was the disciple of Anaximander. Anaximanes comes back again to the mode of thinking like Thales. He says that the primordial stuff of the world and the heaven is air, vapour or mist. Air is the life-giving element in man. By the disappearance of the air, man stops to breath and he ends. "Just as our soul, being air, holds us together, so do breath and air encompass the whole world." Air then is the primordial stuff of the world, and out of which all things originated. He went back to the theory of Thales that the ultimate principle of the universe is a thing. For him water was condensed form of air. Air was therefore the origin of earth, water and fire. He might have thought that earth, air, and fire were all necessary to the creation of life, but the source of all things was air or vapor. Air can also become fire by rarefaction. Air is the thing that animates all things to move. It is something sacred and eternal. The universe is a sacred sphere, with a divine eternal fire or 'pneuma' palpitating at the center and animating all things with a cosmic breath. From air all things arise through the process of rarefaction and condensation. This theory of condensation and rarefaction is an advanced form of scientific explanation of the emergence of elements in the universe.

15.5 PYTHAGORAS (580-497 BC)

Ionian philosophy moved into Southern Italy through the work of Pythagoras. Pythagoras of Samos (530) is the founder of Pythagorean School. He was born in Samos between 580 and 570 B.C., and immigrated to the Greek Colonies in southern Italy about the year 529. Iamblichus opined that Pythagoras was leader and father of divine philosophy. It is written by V.Capparelli that Pythagoras' philosophy is wisdom impregnated with a profound religious spirit. It is clear that there is evident dependence on the teachings of Anaximanes: the universe is a sacred sphere, with a divine eternal fire, or *pneuma* palpitating at the centre and animating all things with a cosmic breath. The Neo-Pythagoreans identified the central fire with Zeus or with the mother of gods, Olympus, castle of Zeus, etc. The fire stands here

as the cause of Unity from where everything derives. He concentrated on cosmology, anthropology and ethics. Pythagorean society had a spirit of religious revival. It began to render the genuine religious teachings.

15.5.1 Ethical Association

Pythagoras founded an association for ethical, religious, and political purpose. His ideal was to develop among his followers the political virtues, to teach them to act for the good of the state, to subordinate them to the whole. Here the individual should learn to control himself or herself, to abase his or her passions, to harmonise his or her soul; he or she should have respect for the authority of elders, teachers and the state. Due to this reason, the view has been held that the Pythagoreans were political communities. But they were not essentially political but religious or ethical. Chief orientation of his teachings was to the religious-ascetic ideas which centred round the purification and purity.

15.5.2 Concept of Soul

Pythagoreans saw the human soul as the life spirit which endures after the death of its first body and may take it abode subsequently in another human or animal body. This theory of metempsychosis or transmigration of souls is ethically significant since it provides for the rewarding of good action and the punishment of evil in these subsequent reincarnations. He taught silence, music, and mathematics to soften the soul. We are not sure all these teachings are coming from Pythagoras or his followers, Pythagoreans. Diogenes Laertius tells us of a poem of Xenophanes, in which Pythagoras told to stop beating a dog, seeing somebody beating it, because he had recognized the voice of a friend in the yelping of that dog. It strengthens the teachings of metempsychosis. Thus, they give importance to soul not to body. That is why they give soul purification and soul training in their life. It is said that it may be due to the influence of Orphicism which was indeed a religion rather than a philosophy though it tends towards pantheism. It was also a way of life not mere cosmological speculation. In this regard Pythagoreans inherited something from Orphicism.

15.5.3 Theory of Opposites

The Pythagoreans also developed a theory of opposites in which the "limiting" and the "non-limiting" were the chief pair. They understood limit as a definite and measurable characteristic of anything, and the non-limited is that which defied attempts at definition and measurement according to Pythagoras. Their standard geometrical example of the latter was the diagonal of any rectangle: it is impossible to express its length simply in terms of the sides.

15.5.4 ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

This is the beginning of a very important approach to ethical problems, the view that 'good' means what is rational and intelligible. Thus, in the fourth century B.C., a later Pythagorean, Archytas of Tarentum, first enunciated the principle of "right reasoning" as the key to good behaviour: "Right reckoning, when discovered, checks civil strife and increases concord...(it is) the standard and deterrent of wrong doers". It is quite possible that Aristotelian and the medieval theories of right reason (*recta ratio*) as the norm of ethical judgement are directly indebted to Pythagorean intellectualism. The life of reason (*logos*) in the classical Greek is respected very much. Aristotle's ethics is constructed on the importance of the rationality of the human soul. With the appearance of the Pythagorean concept of good, the Homeric good was rationalised with all the qualities that this had,

and it has been elevated to the degree of philosophy.

15.5.4 Concept of Number

Aristotle tells us in the *Metaphysics* that Pythagoreans are devoted to mathematics. They were the first who initiated this study. The most important teachings of Pythagoras are that all things are numbers. Number is the basis of everything and the principle of universe. He was explaining the universe with the concept of numbers. All things are countable and we can express many things numerically. So the relation between two related things may be projected in accordance with countable proportion. Just as musical harmony is dependent on number, so also harmony of universe is dependent on number. The world is not only order, beauty and system but a relation of intelligible and multiple proportions or numbers. Philolaus has well expressed it in the following words: "Everything that is known has a number; without this, nothing could be thought or known...Never does falsehood approach the number, because the number's nature is hostile to falsehood, while truth is proper and natural to the species of number. Love, friendship, justice, virtue, health, etc., are pictured on numbers. Love and friendship are counted by the number eight, because they are harmony, and octave is harmony."

Pythagoras regarded numbers as spatially. One is the point; two is the line; three is surface; and four is the solid. To say that all things are numbers, it would mean that all bodies are of points or units in space, which when taken together form a number. Points, lines, and surface are therefore the real units which form all material bodies in nature, and in this sense all material bodies must be considered as numbers. He believed that the things were the copies or imitations of number. The whole phenomena of the universe can be expressed under the concept of number.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for the answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is the ethical principle of Pythagoras?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2) Explain 'all things are numbers.'

.....
.....
.....
.....

15.6 HERACLITUS (536-470 BC)

Heraclitus was born in Ephesus, the son of a noble family and flourished around 504-501 B.C. He always displayed an extreme contempt for democracy. About one hundred fragments of his writings are extant. They are mostly epigrams and cryptic remarks dealing with the cosmos and the soul. He said, "Man is called a baby by God, even as a child by man".

15.6.1 Constant Flux

Heraclitus is best known for his cosmological teaching that all things are in constant flux or change. This is the most basic principle of the nature. He gave importance to the perception on the nature. He says, "Everything flows" just like a river. Everything is moving and nothing is remaining just as in the river. He says: "One cannot enter twice into the same river, nor can one twice touch the same mortal substance in the same state" (fragment B 91). When one person steps into the river for the second time, neither the river nor the person is the same. The person would have already changed, because cells of person's body were newly produced. The person is already in the process of becoming; and since the water in the river constantly flows, the river, where the person entered into, would have already changed within seconds; because it is the flowing water what makes the river as river. Since his entire philosophical conception is dominated by a sense of realities' change, he is also known as "crying philosopher".

15.6.2 Fire and Universal Change

For him the most mobile substance of the world is fire. It is ever-living and never comes to rest, and it is named by him as vapour or breath which is the vital principle in the organism and the essence of the soul. Some interpret that this fire is only a concrete physical symbol for ceaseless activity or process, not itself a substance, but the very denial of all substance. It indicates to a principle that changes constantly or transforms into something other. Only fire can satisfy these conditions. The way of change to upward is same to the way of change to down ward. Fire changes into water, then earth, earth changes back again to water and fire. All things are exchanged for fire and fire for all things. The things we think that they are permanent, are not permanent, the thing that we do not see the movement which takes place in them. He says, "What is cold heats up, what is hot cools, the wet dries and the dry becomes wet" (fragment B126). "This order of the world is not the same for all, but it has always been and is, and will be a living fire for eternity, which at the due time lights and at the due time goes out" (fragment B 30). The world is an ever-living fire.

15.6.3 The Union of the Opposites

World is consisted of opposites. The presence of opposites makes the world as it is. The concept good and evil has its place in the order of the world. If there is no war, how can we acquire peace? The war consists of the peace. Construction is for destruction. Birth is for death. Decease demands the need of health. If there were no summer, what is the use of monsoon?

The novelty of the teaching of Heraclitus is in the conception of unity in diversity, difference in unity. He considers opposites as essential to the being of the One. As a fact the One only exists in the presence of the opposites. This presence of opposites is essential to the unity of the One. The reality for Heraclitus is one; but it is multiple at the same time. This is not accidentally but essentially. It is an essential character of the reality that it should be one and many at the same time. The teaching of Heraclitus is more near to the idea of One existing in the many. Here there is Identity in Difference. He confessed that all things are One. This unity is happening only through the conflict of opposites.

There is a principle to unite the opposites into a unity. The monistic principle of the cosmos is known in the name of Logos, which means reason. The reason of Heraclitus is a

‘universal reason,’ which guides everything that exists in the universe. Among the constant complex changes this ‘universal reason’ takes role of unity of the cosmos. One's creation is another's destruction, and again the destruction of something is the beginning of the creation of something else. Everything is changed into their opposites. In this world remains nothing permanent in their qualities. Everything both is and is not. Therefore everything unites opposites within itself. For example, harmony in music results from the combination of high notes and low notes that mean a union of opposites. Therefore the world is the combination of opposites. "War is the father of all and the king of all"; because, war is in peace. If we do not fight, we will not get peace. Therefore the peace is included in the war and war brings peace.

15.6.4 Ethical Principle

Heraclitean fragments suggest that there is an ever-present rational pattern (logos) in this Process or 'Becoming'. Heraclitus says: "To be ethical is to live a rational life, to obey the dictates of reason, which is the same for us all, the same for the whole world." Man is entrusting himself to his senses, and he lives as if he were epileptic. The strife between opposites, such as love and hate, is to be resolved according to a measure (metron). Research on Heraclitus reveals that his moral views are of primary importance in his teaching. Morality means respect for law, self-discipline, control of the passions; to be moral is to govern oneself by rational principles. The following excerpts from his writings illustrate the lofty idealism of Heraclitus' ethics: "Character is a man's guardian divinity"; "It is hard to contend with passion; for whatever it desires to get it buys at the cost of the soul". "To me one man is ten thousand if he be the best". Man's condition is bad if we look into his mind. One more element is added here to the richness of the concept of our good. Would not this be thought a great influence for the character disposition in Aristotle's virtue theory? Aristotle says that a good action springs from a permanent state of good moral character. "The many are not worth anything, only the few are valuable" (fragment B 104). In another fragment Heraclitus affirms, "Man lights for himself a light in the night, while his eyes are shut: alive, he touches the dead with what is turned off; awake, he touches the sleeping" (fragment B 26). He is negating the sensory knowledge for the access into the truth. His ethical conception is growing from the external to the internal and from internal to the celestial. "No matter how much you travel, and even though you travel every road, you will never reach the boundaries of soul, so profound is the logos it possesses" (fragment B 45).

According to Heraclitus, man has to become a man of intelligent character. He has to reflect from the immediate concrete data to elevate oneself to a unity where empirical experience is pacified in the principle. Here the phenomenology of Heraclitus leads to the discovery of oneself. He is a philosopher of truth by which he has managed to have an intellectual intuition of intelligent character.

15.6.5 Concept of “Logos”

The word '*logos*' of Heraclitus has a decisive philosophical meaning. The philosophical character of the '*logos*' consists of its value in unifying the universe. The '*logos*' brings the contraries as harmony or as the "coexistence of contraries" or equilibrium. The variety of formulas also indicates the disparity of interpretations, which can be fundamentally divided into groups: the '*logos*' is not outside the contraries, but is their immanent law. Guthrie interprets that the harmony of contraries contains three affirmations. They are: 1) everything is *made up of contraries*; 2) the *contraries are identical*; 3) *war is their creative force* and the constituent director.

As a conclusion, in the teachings of Heraclitus, we could see that there were threefold

character: linguistic, gnosiological and ontological. 'Logos' reveals itself, it thinks itself and it is. It will not be proper, if we see a trinity made up of god, fire and 'logos'. Heraclitus speaks of the One as God and as wise. God is the universal Reason. It is the universal law immanent in all things and binding all things into unity and determining the constant change in accordance with universal law. Man's reason is a moment in this universal Reason. Man, therefore, has to struggle to live according to the reign of unalterable law. Man's reason and consciousness, which are the fiery element, are the precious element. Without pure fire body is worthless.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for the answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Write a short note on the ethical principle of Heraclitus.

.....
.....
.....
.....

2) Explain the concept of "Logos" according to Heraclitus.

.....
.....
.....
.....

15.7 LET US SUM UP

Ionian and Pythagorean Philosophy taught us to reflect on the external nature and tried to get into the essence of the universe. For every reality there should be a cause and this cause must be the ultimate one which unites, directs, guides and is present in everything. These philosophers helped us to develop a truth seeking mind. They emphasized that it is our duty to disclose the mysteries of the relevant issues in the universe where we live. All the above Ionian philosophers had their reason and logic in solving and answering the questions. All generations in all periods had their existential problems. The wise men of each period have suggested their insights and visions to solve the problems and for a better life. We must have an integral vision on the reality to propose a right view on the universe. When the Ionian philosophers were trying to highlight an aspect of the universe, for example, Change for Heraclitus, he ignored the other reality of Permanence of the universe. Since Pythagoras was a mathematician he ignored many other aspects of the truth about the universe, while stressing the concept number. However, all these philosophers laid foundation for a systematic philosophy which was developed by Plato and Aristotle.

15.8 KEY WORDS

Reality: Reality is that which exists objectively.

Existence: Existence is that which is definite in the mind or outside the mind.

Being: Being is that which is in some way or something.

Change: Change is transition or passage from one state to another.

Mind: Mind is the subjective, comprehensive structure of a rational being.

15.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Burnet, J. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Methuen, Fourth Edition, 1930.
Copleston, F. *A History of Philosophy*. Vol.1. New York: Doubleday Image Book, 1985.
Freeman, K. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. London: Blackwell, 1948.

Gaarder, J. *Sophie's World*. Ed. Paulette Moeller. New York: Berkley Book, 1994.

Kirk G., Raven J. & Schofield M. *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Second Edition, 1983.

Kuttikat, L. *Greek Philosophy*. Kottayam: Apostolic Seminary, 2004.

Macintyre, A. *A Short History of Ethics*. London: Routledge, 1967.

Nahm, M. *Selections From Early Greek Philosophy*. New York,: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Third Edition, 1947.

Oakeley, H. *Greek Ethical Thought From Homer to the Stoics*. New York: Dutton, 1925.

Owens, J. *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960.
Thilly, F. *A History of Philosophy*. Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1978.

Winespear, A. & Silverberg, T. *Who Was Socrates?*. New York,: Russel & Russel, 1960.

Zeller, E. *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*. Tr. L. R. Palmer. New York: Humanities Press, 1931.

15.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) According to Thales, water was the original stuff. Because, water has the potency to become solid, liquid and vaporous forms. It evaporates in the heat of the sun, and according to Thales it is the transformation of water into fire. Water comes down again in the form of rain and it is transformed into earth. Water is essential to life. The reason is that nourishment, seed, and heat which are essential to life, contain moisture or wet. Hence water is the primordial principle, and all things (*physis*) were water (*arche*) and are water (*physis*). Water is the material cause of all things.
- 2) According to Anaximander, the primary principle and the ultimate end of all things is indeterminate. He named this as the material cause. It is different from any finite things. It is infinite. From this indeterminate cause emerged all the heavens and the earth. It is "Ageless and Eternal" This principle controls all elements, but it is not to be confused with these same elements. This primordial principle, called in

Greek *apeiron*, will be divine, immobile, not generated, immutable, venerable, an absolute justice. This is the reality behind all cause and effect.

Check Your Progress II

1) Pythagoras taught his ethical principles to develop among his followers the political virtues, to teach them to act for the good of the state, to subordinate them to the whole. Accordingly, the individual should learn to control himself or herself, to abase his or her passions, to harmonise his or her soul; he or she should have respect for the authority of elders, teachers and the state. His ethics was centred round the purification and purity.

2) Pythagoras regarded numbers spatially. One is the point; two is the line; three is surface; and four is the solid. To say that all things are numbers, it would mean that all bodies are of points or units in space, which when taken together form a number. Points, lines, and surface are therefore the real units which form all material bodies in nature, and in this sense all material bodies must be considered as numbers. He believed that the things were the copies or imitations of number. The whole phenomena of the universe can be expressed under the concept of number.

Check Your Progress III

1) Heraclitus says: "To be ethical is to live a rational life, to obey the dictates of reason, which is the same for us all, the same for the whole world."

Morality means respect for law, self-discipline, control of the passions; to be moral is to govern oneself by rational principles.

"Character is a man's guardian divinity"; "It is hard to contend with passion; for whatever it desires to get it buys at the cost of the soul". "To me one man is ten thousand if he be the best".

"Man lights for himself a light in the night, while his eyes are shut: alive, he touches the dead with what is turned off; awake, he touches the sleeping" (fragment B 26). He is negating the sensory knowledge for the access into the truth. His ethical conception is growing from the external to the internal and from internal to the celestial. "No matter how much you travel, and even though you travel every road, you will never reach the boundaries of soul, so profound is the logos it possesses" (fragment B 45).

2) The word '*logos*' of Heraclitus has a decisive philosophical meaning. The philosophical character of the '*logos*' consists of its value in unifying the universe. The '*logos*' brings the contraries as harmony or as the "coexistence of contraries" or equilibrium. The '*logos*' is not outside the contraries, but is their immanent law. Guthrie interprets that the harmony of contraries contains three affirmations. They are: 1) everything is *made up of contraries*; 2) the *contraries are identical*; 3) *war is their creative force* and the constituent director.

UNIT 16 ELEATIC AND ATOMISTIC PHILOSOPHERS*

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Parmenides
- 16.3 Zeno of Elea
- 16.4 Empedocles
- 16.5 Anaxagoras
- 16.6 Democritus & Leucippus (Atomist)
- 16.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.8 Key Words
- 16.9 Further Readings and References
- 16.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

16.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we try to identify the Eleatic and the Atomist philosophical thoughts which made the ancient Greek philosophy so attractive and rich before the world. Both the Eleatic as well as the Atomist are trying to find out the Ultimate Cause which rules over the universe. Atomists say that the universe is formed out of small invisible and physically indivisible particles called 'Atoms' which are eternal and immutable. This mode of thinking slowly develops into a materialist and quantitative theory; because they deny the immortality of souls. By the end of this unit you will be able to identify:

- whether the ultimate principle of the universe is 'Being' or 'Becoming'.
- the fantastic argument of Zeno to prove the permanence.
- the difference between the Pluralist and the Atomist philosophers; and likewise the differences between the qualitative and quantitative philosophy.
- the ethical insights which govern the universe
- an attempt at reconciliation of the monists who simultaneously uphold two contradicting principles such as 'Being' and 'Becoming'.
- The atom theory.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

When Parmenides was sixty five years old, he might have exchanged his own ideas with young Socrates at Athens. Parmenides is the one who prepared laws for his native city of

* Dr. Loser Kuttikal, Prostaya Vidyapith, Kottiyam. This unit is taken from BPY-003 (Unit 1 Block 2).

Elea. In the beginning of his philosophic career, Parmenides was a follower of Pythagoras, but afterwards he left those thoughts in favour of his own. His main teaching was that the reality is “Permanence” and “change” is an illusion.

Proclus said that Zeno made forty arguments to demonstrate that being is one, thinking that he had to help his master. Empedocles wrote his philosophical thoughts in the form of poetry. He agrees with Parmenides that the reality is permanent. But the concept of change is an undeniable fact and the change cannot be looked upon as an illusion. In this statement he is agreeing with Heraclitus.

Leucippus of Miletus was the founder of the Atomist School. According to the Atomists, there are an infinite number of indivisible units. They are called atoms. So the fundamental elements of the universe are atoms for Atomists School. They cannot be perceived by senses.

16.2 PARMENIDES

Parmenides (540-480 BC) is the head of the Eleatic School of Greek Philosophy. He is the one who developed the concept of “being” in opposition to the concept “becoming”.

16.2.1 Concept of ‘Being’

Parmenides developed the conception of 'Being' in opposition to the 'Becoming' of Heraclitus. First of all we have to study the truth – the philosophy of ‘Being’. This being is indestructible, perfect and intelligible. He regarded being as material. He thinks that this being is finite, since he thinks that this is one. Being is for the time being infinite, as having neither beginning nor end, but it is spatially finite. He has also difference of opinion compared to Pythagoras’ concept of abstract essences. For Pythagoras’ reality consisted of geometric points, then everything is reduced to abstract essences, just as the point, the line, the triangle, the circle, the cube etc., are abstract. Pythagoras says that the existence must be protected; the existent cannot be reduced into logical elements. The existent exists before thought. Before arithmetic and geometry, a philosophy of being is or metaphysics exists on which thought depends, and not vice versa.

16.2.2 Interpretation of ‘Being’

What is this ‘Being’, which is expressed as ‘to be’ as infinitive, and with the singular participle ‘being’, and the third person present indicative ‘is’? There are six interpretations on this ‘Being’.

- 1) **Mystical interpretation:** Plotinus interpreted the being of Parmenides as to be Xenophanes’ Unum, god.
- 2) **Idealistic interpretation:** This is done by Hegel and Stenzel. The existent of Parmenides is a production of thought; to think means to be.
- 3) **Materialistic interpretation:** it is the sum of material bodies.
- 4) **Logical interpretation:** Being is the copula of a proposition. No being exists before the predication and hence before grammar and Logic.
- 5) **Platonic-Aristotelian or categorical interpretation:** It is a transcendent concept with various meanings: substance, quality, quantity, place etc., they are modes of being. Being is a concept which is spoken in many ways.
- 6) **Existential or metaphysical interpretation:** Being is the original and primary form of existence in the world.

Due to many reasons, according to Dario Composta, the first four and the sixth interpretations cannot be accepted. This being cannot be god because it is never called a god in the texts; and this would make Parmenides a pure monist. The idealistic interpretation does not show the attitude of the Greeks, because those philosophers were

mainly objectivistic. The materialistic theory is also not acceptable, since being is not the “arche” of the Ionian philosophers. Logical interpretation can not be taken, because he is not working from a judgement to arrive at reality.

16.2.3 Principle of Non-Change

How is this possible, he asks, how can a thing both be and not be? How can one thing change into another? How can one quality become another quality? If the answer is positive, then we must admit that something is and something is not. At the same time this would again imply that something can come from nothing and something can become nothing. Parmenides says, "For never will this be proved that things, that are not, are". This is what is known as the *principle of non-change*. Things which have no existence are nothing. Nothing means non-being. If they are non-being, how can we prove that they are? The answer is no and this is an impossibility. The impossibility remains always an impossibility and never becomes a possibility.

16.2.4 Principle of Indestructibility

“Being cannot not be”, or as the text puts it: “it is not possible for it not to be” (Fragment 11). The Aristotelian *principle of non-contradiction* states that while the being is (but could not be), it necessarily is. Here with this *principle of indestructibility*, according to Parmenides, the being necessarily is. Therefore, Parmenides asserted the un-changeability of being; in so far as he conceived of being as material, he asserted the indestructibility of matter. Thus Parmenides said that being can neither arise nor pass away, that is the indestructibility of the matter. Being is complete one in itself and is Reality which cannot be added to? If it is not one but divided, then it must be divided by something else. This something else does not exist besides the existent. That means besides being there is nothing. Nothing could be added to, because anything that is added to being would also be a being. Therefore, forms of becoming are negated.

16.2.5 Being and Non-being

Another way of expression: if being has *become*, it must either have come from non-being or from being. If from non-being, it has come from nothing, which is impossible, because, "besides the existent, nothing non-existent exists". In *Metaph*, 986b 28, Aristotle commends on this that Parmenides believes that the existent is of necessity one so that nothing else exists. On this very point Aristotle has spoken more clearly in his work on *Physics*, 184b 16; 185a 9; 185b 18; 186a 7; 186a 22. If it is from being, then it has come from itself. It is the same as saying that it is identical with itself, and thus has always been. Parmenides concludes: "that all things that are, are one and this is being". This is the *principle of identity*. Hence there can be only one eternal, non-derived, unchangeable being. It must be continuous, indivisible and immovable.

16.2.6 Being and Thought

Moreover, being and thought are one, for what cannot be thought, cannot be; and what cannot be, i.e., non-being, cannot be thought. That is, thought and being are identical. Whatever is thought has being. Parmenides may also have believed that being and thought exist in the sense that reality is endowed with mind. An important text shows: “Thought and the function of thought are the same thing, because you will not find thought without being in which it is expressed. In fact, thought is, or it is nothing when outside of being” (Fragment B 8).

16.2.7 Being and Illusion

All change is inconceivable, and, therefore, the world of sense is an illusion. To regard

as true what we perceive by the senses is to confuse being with non-being. Parmenides shows a firm belief in reason: reality is obeying to reason and what is contradictory to thought cannot be real. "He did not claim that reality was thought, but that it could be truly apprehended only by thought". If this reality is knowledge for Parmenides, his concept of good is formed by reason. It is sure that some sort of reason certainly qualifies his concept of *agathos* (good) and seems to be very near to the control of intellectual virtue over moral virtue of Aristotle.

16.3 ZENO OF ELEA

Zeno of Elea (490-430 BC) was a student of Parmenides and he came from the town of Elea. There is difference of opinion about his discipleship of Parmenides. Zeno was a mathematical and logical genius. He showed the stupidity of plurality. He was very famous for his dialectic. Being is one and immutable. Plurality and motion are contradictions in themselves. He denies the reality of both. His argument clearly brings out the discrepancy between logic and experience.

16.3.1 Arguments against Plurality

He argued: If the whole of being is a plurality, it is formed of many points, and this whole can be proved to be both infinitely small and infinitely great. One thing is formed of small parts and the same thing is formed of large parts, it is absurd to say that the one and the same whole is both infinitely small and the infinitely big. For example, let us take a line which is made up of many points each of which is having a certain size. Then the line must be infinitely big; because it is made up of infinite number of units. Therefore, everything in the world must be big in size or the world itself must be infinitely great. Just imagine, on the other side, if the units are without magnitude, the whole universe also will be without magnitude. Since the single unit has no magnitude, the whole sum also will not have magnitude. Then, in conclusion, the universe will be infinitely small. Hence we reject completely the initial supposition of plurality.

If we believe that many beings exist, then Zeno says that this belief is an absurdity. These beings, which are existing, are numerically defined. If they are not numerically counted, how can they exist? If it is not possible to count them, then they are infinite. They are not counted because between two beings (two parts) there is another being. And between the third and the original two there rests yet another; and so on ad infinitum.

There is an argument against the Pythagorean Doctrine of space. Parmenides said that there was no empty space. Zeno supported this view and reduced the opposite view to absurdity. Suppose, there is a space in which things are. If that space is nothing, then things cannot be in it. If this space is something, then this space needs another space and so on ad infinitum. If there is no such space, then things cannot be in space. Things therefore are not in space or in an empty void. In that case multiplicity also does not exist.

Similarly, we shall think that a body is moving through space. In order to pass to some other space it has to pass at least half of that space, in order to reach the half it has to pass half of the half, therefore, ad infinitum. How can you cross infinite number of points and thereby an infinite distance? Therefore no body will cross anywhere and motion is impossible. In this style movement becomes impossible.

Even in movement it does not move, because a body in motion must occupy its own dimensions. Now in every event of its motion, an arrow occupies a space equal to its dimensions, while these dimensions do not have movement. Occupying space means that object is at rest. Therefore the moving arrow is still. Nothing is moving at the moment in which it occupies its own dimensions. As a disciple of Parmenides, Zeno was refuting all the plurality in the universe.

The ultimate principle of the universe, according to Parmenides, is permanence. A thing that exists cannot change into another. If someone believes that they change, that will be a mere illusion. For him change is impossible. He believed that everything, that we experience, that exists, had always existed. Nothing can become anything other than what it is. He was sure that human sense felt the change; on the other side he was sure that his reason felt the permanence even within this change. He has given more importance to the feeling of reason and other is simply denied as an illusion. He was a man of rationalism. He believed that human reason is the primary source of our knowledge of the world.

16.4 EMPEDOCLES

Empedocles (490-430 BC) is from Sicily an Island near Italy. He was a leader of the Democratic Party in his native city. He is also known as magician and wonder worker. He helped us to come out of these complex concepts of his predecessors like Heraclitus and Parmenides. He is of the opinion that these philosophers have concentrated on the monistic way of explaining the substance of the world.

16.4.1 Cosmogony

He says that one thing cannot turn into another matter. In fact, fire cannot change. Real fire will remain as real fire and it will continue to be fire. At this point Parmenides is right by telling that ‘nothing changes’. On the contrary, Empedocles accepted the teaching of Heraclitus that the sense perception is also true. Here, what we see is the change of the nature. He concludes that this problem arises because of the belief in one single principle. As a solution to this above riddle he suggests that the cosmos is made up of four principles: earth, water, air, and fire. All movements in the cosmos consisted of these four elements. They come together and are separated. The cosmos is a mixture of these elements, but the proportion of these elements would be different. In one comparison Empedocles refers it to the work of a painter. He can make different paintings with four colors: white, black, red, and yellow. The intelligent painter creates various pictures. He harmoniously mixes these colors, some in greater measure and some in lesser, and he creates beautiful figures similar to. The death or destruction of one thing is due to the separation of the unity of these principles. These elements remain always without change, even if we notice the changes with our eyes. Therefore it is not right that everything changes. In reality nothing changes, but what really happens is the combination and separation of these things. All through these combinations and separations these principles keep their character without change.

16.4.2 Principle of Unity and Separation

One doubt remains unclarified. What makes the thing to combine and to disintegrate? Empedocles added two different forces at work in the process of nature. They are love and strife. Love brings unity and life, but strife causes destruction and death. These are the two structural forces in the cosmogony. Nothing becomes, nothing is destroyed and everything is eternal. “There is no means through which something would arise from what earlier did not exist and through which what exist would perish. This would be a vain thing without any terminus. In fact, (being) will always be, wherever we may look” (Fragment B 6). Therefore life and death is not the goal, but mixing and separating is the goal of love and hate through a universal eternal cycle. He also found out the separation of ‘substance’ and ‘force’.

Check your progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Give the second argument to confirm that there is no change but only permanence according to Parmenides?

2. Give the first argument against Plurality according to Zeno?

16.5 ANAXAGORAS

Anaxagoras (500-428 BC) born in Clazomenae, in Asia Minor, took up his abode at Athens, and became the friend of the great statesman Pericles, who aimed to make his city the intellectual as well as political center of Hellas.

Anaxagoras like Empedocles, adopted the teachings of Parmenides that the being is permanent. That means, being neither comes into being nor disintegrates, but it remains unchangeable. Anaxagoras does not agree with the teaching of Empedocles the ultimate units are many like earth, air, fire and water. He teaches that everything which has parts which are qualitatively the same as the whole is ultimate and un-derived. For example a piece of silver is cut into two, the second piece also will have the quality of the first. Here the part is also the same as whole. Those things, which have the same quality even in parts and are same as the whole, are ultimate and un-derived. They are mixtures composed of many qualitatively different particles. According to Anaxagoras there was no individual particle, but all kinds of particles stayed together and they were indivisible. But in reality some particle was dominating, that is why something becomes gold and other thing becomes silver. He continues, "In everything there is a portion of everything". In this way he was trying to explain the concept change and permanence. If it is so, it is easy to explain that flesh can come from grass or grass can come from flesh. From one nature, something of a different nature can emerge.

16.5.1 Teleology

In Anaxagoras we encounter for the first time the linking of teleology with the uniqueness and perfection of the world order. He sees the entire complex world-process, as it now appears, as the result of a long series of movements, which followed necessarily from the original rotation. To account for the initial motion he puts this *nous*, an intelligent principle, as the cause. *Nous* is a spontaneous active being, the free source of all movement and life in the world. It rules over all that has life. This *nous* or mind is a special contribution of Anaxagoras. *Nous* has power over all things that have life, both great and small. It is controlling the whole revolution and it started to revolve in the beginning. The *nous* is a teleological or purposive principle.

16.5.2 Ethical Principle

He had no formal ethical teachings but at the same time he introduced the concept of mind or intelligence (*nous*) into Greek philosophical studies. He stressed that "Mind is infinite and self-ruling, and is mixed with nothing, but is alone by itself". Aristotle gave Anaxagoras credit for the soberness of his thought but criticised him for failing to use *nous*

consistently in explaining cosmic events. It is possible that the concept of mind in Anaxagoras would have helped Aristotle to discuss the mental aspects of human conduct. Sometimes, Anaxagoras is calling the mind the most rarefied of all things. Thereby he is suggesting that it is a kind of matter. *Nous* is not to be considered as creating matter. At the same time it is both immanent and transcendent. *Nous* is present in all living things. Among living beings it has essential differences in bodies, but not in their souls. Anaxagoras, however, does not explain the human consciousness as having independent selfhood. There is confusion in his doctrine of mind, whether it is theism or pantheism. Aristotle criticises him saying that Anaxagoras brings the mind only when mechanical explanation fails to answer the reality.

16.6 DEMOCRITUS & LEUCIPPUS (ATOMISTS)

The founders of Atomists' School are Leucippus of Miletus and Democritus of Abdera. But, Aristotle and Theophrastus made Leucippus to be the sole founder of this School. Democritus of Abdera was born about 460 B.C. in the commercial city of Abdera, situated on the coast of Thrace, and died in 370 B.C. He said that the universe is built upon certain small invisible particles. The characteristics of these particles are eternity and immutability. He named these small units 'atoms'. The meaning of the term 'a-tom' is 'not-divisible'.

16.6.1 Atom Theory

For him the most important thing was that the substantial element of the nature, out of which the nature was built up, could not be indefinitely divided into smaller particles. If this were possible the permanent character of the nature would be in danger. There would not be then any permanency to the nature. He also agreed in the teaching of Parmenides that 'nothing comes from nothing'. So, the substantial particle of nature should be eternal, and then only the nature can come out of it. These eternal particles which are atoms, are firm and solid, but they are not identical. Otherwise, the multiplicity and the unity of the nature would be impossible. Because, we see mountains, oceans, sky, ameba, birds, fish, flowers, animals and human beings. He confirmed that the universe is composed with unlimited number and variety of atoms. Out of them, some are round and smooth, some are irregular and jagged. And precisely due to their multiplicity in eternity, they could combine each other to unlimited bodies. When a body dissolved or disintegrated, the atoms become free and ready for other new combinations of bodies. Atoms moved around in space, but they are hooked and are free to join together for a new creation.

According to him, the only things that existed were atoms and the void. Soul' and 'force' have no much role in his teaching on the universe. 'Soul' is connected with brain. Once brain disintegrated, we lose consciousness, and then the special round smooth shaped 'soul atoms' spread in all directions. He believed that nothing could influence the universe except atom. It could be possessed by some other new bodies. That means, human beings have no immortal soul. Therefore, he is known as a materialist, since he believed in material things. In nature, everything happens quite mechanically, it does not mean that it happens randomly. Because, he said, there were the inevitable laws of necessity. A natural cause, which is inherent in everything, guides the happenings in the nature. All the processes in the universe are quite natural, though, it is mechanical.

16.6.2 Theory of Knowledge

The theory of knowledge according to this school is developed from the sense perception. Sense perception is formed by the action of emanations resembling the perceived body. All bodies transmit their image through air. The image, which is transmitted by the body,

modifies the object near to it and so on; finally it reaches the sense organs of a person or a living being. If the images proceeding from other objects interfere with other images in the process of transmission, then illusion takes place. If they proceed without interference true knowledge takes place. It means a direct hit on the organs of sense and finally on the soul.

The sensible qualities (colour, sound, taste, smell and touch) are not in the things themselves. It is merely the effects of combinations of atoms on our sense organs. Atoms as such have no qualities other than shape or size. Hence sense perception does not provide true knowledge of things. It shows how things affect the human beings. The Greek atomists have already distinguished between the primary qualities (shape, impenetrability, etc.) and the secondary qualities (colour, sound, smell, etc). This distinction is a main discussion in modern philosophy.

We can only think of atoms, we cannot see them as they are. Sense perception is not a clear knowledge. Thought, which penetrates our sense perception and appearances, and reaches atom, is the only right knowledge. Democritus is a rationalist. Rational thought begins where sense perception ends. It is the genuine way of knowing. Reason is the highest function of soul. For Democritus soul and reason are the same.

16.6.3 Ethical Principle

Democritus stressed the soul as the locus of human well-being. His concept of *eudaimonia* includes both the notion of 'good existence' (*eu-esto*) and of 'good feeling' (*eu-thumie*). Pace Gosling and Taylor think that Democritus was the first Greek philosopher to produce a systematic ethical theory. The most important step towards systematisation was, the transition from the vague ethical thinking that everybody wants to be happy or cheerful, or free from troubles.

On the list of Democritus' writings on ethics there appears a treatise *Peri euthymias* (DL IX 46) of which only a sentence or two has remained. Later doxographers, assuming the framework of eudaimonistic theories, tell us that Democritus declared *euthymia* to be the goal of life (*telos*).

The superiority of reason is taken into consideration in the ethical life. The end of all conduct of men is well-being of society and ultimately of man. Well-being means not only the intellectual satisfaction but also the pleasure of senses. We can trace a line of hedonism in the teaching of Democritus. True happiness is the end of man's life. It is an inner state of satisfaction or pleasure, depending on the tranquillity, harmony and fearlessness of the soul. This happiness is not coming from wealth or material good, nor from the pleasure of the body. It needs a little pain, and requires repetition and moderation of pleasure. The less you desire, the less you are disappointed.

All virtues are valuable only if they help to cultivate happiness. Envy, jealousy and bitterness of mind bring friction and they will destroy everybody. The sense of duty must be the basis of doing the right thing; it should not be from the fear of punishment. We have to serve the state too, because if the state is in peace, all realm of state will grow; if the governance of the state is corrupted, then there will not be any order or law but only chaos.

16.6.4 Theology of Democritus

According to Democritus God exists. God is composed of atoms. The Gods are mortal like men, but they live longer. They are more powerful than human being and they possess reason of high order. Gods are known to men in dreams. They do not interfere in the affairs of men and therefore men need not fear them. Like all other things, God is subjected to the motion of atoms. One must achieve mental power to reach the goal reflecting and contemplating on beautiful acts.

Check your progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How does Empedocles explain the theory of Cosmogony?

2) Sketch out the Atom theory of the Atomists?

16.7 LET US SUM UP

We have been looking into the cosmological point of speculation basing mainly on the reflection of the Eleatic and the Atomist philosophers. Though they were convinced of the cosmic unity, they had to answer the problem of the multiplicity in the world. They, therefore, faced the dilemma of the one and the many.

The Atomist and the Pluralist Schools were slowly preparing the base of reconciliation of these contraries of 'Change' and 'Permanence' proposed by their predecessors. It was really a tough task for them to fulfil, though they were not fully successful in their attempt. The Pluralist and the Atomist School gave the same answer to the problem put forward by Heraclitus and Parmenides. That is how, they admitted the change, but it is accepted as relative change not as an absolute change. In this explaining they were admitting the permanent reality i.e., Being. In other words, they agree absolute change is impossible but relative change is possible. Nothing in the universe arises or perishes, everything is keeping the same nature, but through combination we feel that something arises, and through separation we felt that they disintegrate. Aristotle and Plato will explain it more clearly as we are to see in the coming units. Now it is time to switch over to the problem of man as such by the time of Sophists and Socrates.

16.8 KEY WORDS

Illusion: Illusion is the state of mind in which one mistakes one thing for the other due to passion, prejudice, or conditioning. It is distinct from hallucination in which one perceives an absent thing as present.

Cause: Cause is a real principle which exercises a positive influence in the production of an effect.

Universe: Universe is the totality of space which includes all the galaxies.

16.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Burnet, J. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Methuen, Fourth Edition, 1930.

Copleston, F. *A History of Philosophy*. Vol.1. New York: Doubleday Image Book, 1985.

Freeman, K. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. London: Blackwell, 1948.

Gaarder, J. *Sophie's World*. Tr. Paulette Moeller. New York: Berkley Book, 1994.

Kirk, G., Raven, J. & Schofield, M. *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Second Edition, 1983.

Kuttikatt, L. *Greek Philosophy*. Kottayam: Apostolic Seminary, 2004.

Macintyre, A. *A Short History of Ethics*. London: Routledge, 1967.

Nahm, M. *Selections From Early Greek Philosophy*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Third Edition, 1947.

Oakeley, H. *Greek Ethical Thought From Homer to the Stoics*. New York: Dutton, 1925.

Owens, J. *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts,

1960. Thilly, F. *A History of Philosophy*. Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1978.

Winespear, A. & Silverberg, T. *Who Was Socrates?* New York. Russel & Russel, 1960.

Zeller, E. *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*. Tr. L. R. Palmer, New York: Humanities Press, 1931.

16.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) "Being cannot not be", or as the text puts it: "it is not possible for it not to be" (Fragment 11). The Aristotelian *principle of non-contradiction* states that while the being is (but could not be), it necessarily is. Here with this *principle of indestructibility*, according to Parmenides, the being necessarily is. Therefore, Parmenides asserted the unchangeability of being; in so far as he conceived of being as material, he asserted the indestructibility of matter. Thus Parmenides said that being can neither arise nor pass away, that is the indestructibility of the matter. Being is complete one in itself and is Reality which cannot be added to.
- 2) If we believe that many beings exist, then Zeno says that this belief is an absurdity. These beings, which are existing, are numerically defined. If they are not numerically counted, how can they exist? If it is not possible to count them, then they are infinite. They are not counted because between two beings (two parts) there is another being. And between the third and the original two there rests yet another; and so on ad infinitum.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) The cosmos is made up of four elements: earth, water, air, and fire. All movements in the cosmos consist of these four elements. They come together and are separated. The cosmos is a mixture of these elements, but the proportion of these elements would be different. In one comparison Empedocles refers it to the work of a painter. He can make different paintings with four colors: white, black, red, and yellow. The intelligent painter creates various pictures. He harmoniously mixes these colors, some in greater measure and some in lesser, and he creates beautiful figures similar to. The death or destruction of one thing is due to the separation of the unity of these principles. These elements remain always without change, even if we notice the changes with our eyes. Therefore it is not right that everything changes. In reality nothing changes, but what really happens is the combination and separation of these things. All through these combinations and separations these principles keep their character without change.

- 2) For Atomists, the most important thing was that the substantial element of the nature, out of which the nature was built up, could not be indefinitely divided into smaller particles. If this were possible the permanent character of the nature would be in danger. There would not be then any permanency to the nature. He also agreed in the teaching of Parmenides that 'nothing comes from nothing'. So, the substantial particle of nature should be eternal, and then only the nature can come out of it. These eternal particles which are atoms, are firm and solid, but they are not identical. Otherwise, the multiplicity and the unity of the nature would be impossible. Because, we see mountains, oceans, sky, ameba, birds, fish, flowers, animals and human beings. He confirmed that the universe is composed of unlimited number of atoms. Out of them, some are round and smooth, some are irregular and jagged. And precisely due to their multiplicity in eternity, they could combine each other to unlimited bodies. When a body dissolved or disintegrated, the atoms become free and ready for other new combinations of bodies. Atoms moved around in space, but they are hooked and are free to join together for a new creation.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 17

SOPHISTIC PHILOSOPHERS*

Structure

17.0 Objectives

17.1 Introduction

17.2 Sophist Philosophy: Main Features

17.3 Major Sophist Philosophers

17.4 Let Us Sum Up

17.5 Key Words

17.6 Further Readings and References

17.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

17.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we explain in detail the Sophist movement and their philosophical insights that abandoned all abstract, metaphysical enquiries concerning the nature of the cosmos and focused on the practical issues of life.

By the end of this unit you will be able to know:

- Their foul or fair argumentation
- Epistemological and ethical skepticism and relativism of the Sophists
- The differentiation between the early philosophers and Sophists
- The basic philosophical positions of Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippias and Gorgias

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Sophist movement flourished in 5th century B.C., shortly before the emergence of the Socratic period. Xenophon, a historian of 4th century B.C., describes the Sophists as wandering teachers who offered wisdom for sale in return for money. The Sophists were, then, professional teachers, who travelled about, from city to city, instructing people, especially the youth. They were paid large sums of money for their job. Until then teaching was considered something sacred and was not undertaken on a commercial basis. The Sophists claimed to be teachers of wisdom and virtue. These terms, however, did not have their original meaning in sophism. What they meant by these terms was nothing but a proficiency or skillfulness in practical affairs of daily life. This, they claimed, would lead people to success in life, which, according to them, consisted in the acquisition and

* Dr. Joseph Thalodi, St. Joseph Pontifical Institute, Aluwa. This unit is taken from BPY-003 (Unit 3 (The Sophists) Block 2).

enjoyment of material wealth as well as positions of power and influence in society.

The Intellectual Context

The epistemological and ethical skepticism and relativism of the Sophists reflected a reaction against the abstract and metaphysical philosophy of the pre-Socratic thinkers. The earlier Greek philosophers had been chiefly interested in investigating the ultimate nature of the cosmos. Their systems excluded one another. In fact the Sophists' attention was diverted from the problem of Nature to problem of Man by the diversity of opinions found among the early Greek philosophers. Faced with this baffling array of conflicting theories of the world, the Sophists came to the conclusion that the lack of agreement among nature philosophers was due to the inherent limitations of the human reason. The Sophists however subjected the human reason to a searching criticism. As a result they came to a thoroughly relativistic conclusion, denying all objectivity to knowledge and thus paving the way for skepticism.

The Socio-Political Context

Political life gained momentum in Greece after the Persian Wars (500 – 449 BC) and this was particularly the case in democratic Athens which became the centre of intense political, cultural and economic activity in the region. The free citizen was expected to play an active role in the affairs of the state, and so he had to be trained to share greater political responsibilities. Mastery of rhetoric and oratory was of considerable importance in building up a political career. In fact the Sophists considered speech as a powerful weapon with which the speaker might bewitch his audience and induce them to accept his views. In a Greek democracy, there was money to be made by winning lawsuits, and the Sophists claimed to be able to teach the right way of winning lawsuits. By instructing the youth in political eristic skills, the Sophists helped create a new aristocracy of intellect and ability, naturally frowned upon by the older aristocracy that lived by conventional wisdom in knowledge and conduct.

17.2 SOPHIST PHILOSOPHY: MAIN FEATURES

As has been pointed out, the Sophists were concerned to explore problems of knowledge and conduct rather than the structure of the universe or the ultimate constituents of reality. Their acquaintance with earlier philosophers had convinced them that it was impossible ever to attain certain knowledge of external reality, that human reason could not solve the riddle of the universe. The more pertinent, therefore, was an enquiry into the very nature of human knowledge and the practical rules of moral conduct. Thus, the chief contribution of sophist thought concerns basic questions in ethics and epistemology as well as the proper method and goal of rational enquiry. This represented a major change of philosophical interest from the problems of nature to the problem of man though this change is best seen in the philosophy of Socrates.

17.2.1 Epistemology

Pre-Socratic philosophers, while investigating the nature of reality, had taken for granted the competence of human reason to attain truth. It never occurred to them to criticize the intellect itself. It was this very assumption that the Sophists called in question; for, why else should these great thinkers arrive at conflicting, even contradictory, conclusions about the nature of reality since they all were investigating the same object? The conclusion arrived at by the Sophists was that knowledge depends upon the particular knower, that

what seems true to him *is* true for him, that there is no objective truth, but only subjective opinion. Protagoras' famous dictum, namely, 'Man is the measure of all things' is a repudiation of the paradoxical conclusions of the nature philosophers in favour of the common sense judgments of the individual man. Such a view would make the individual a law unto himself in matters of knowledge. There may be as many views of the same thing as there are individuals, yet all will be true. Likewise, two opposite statements on the same subject may both be true, each relative to the individual making it. This being so, there is no point in attempting to demonstrate *the* truth of a statement that is acceptable to all; rather, it is the business of the Sophist to persuade people to embrace one of the two opposing statements rather than the other.

17.2.2 Ethics

The ethical views of the Sophists are of a piece with their epistemology in that these views follow natural from the subjectivism and relativism of their theoretical position. If knowledge of reality is impossible, then knowledge of right and wrong is impossible; there is no universal right and wrong so that each person is free to make ethical choices according to his conscience. If it was conflicting cosmologies of early Greek thought that generated the Sophists' epistemological skepticism, it was the diversity of customs, morals and traditions prevailing in various nations that led them to question the validity of absolute, objective standards of action and value. Sophism differed from the early Greek philosophy not only in regard to subject matter, namely, metaphysics and epistemology, but also in the method and the proper goal of philosophical investigation.

17.2.3 Method of Enquiry

The method of the Sophists was "empirico-inductive" while that of the early philosophers was, in the main, deductive. The latter would typically start with a general principle, and then proceed to explain the phenomena in accordance with that principle. The Sophists, on the other hand, started with particular observations and facts. They would have collected a plentiful store of them from their travels. From these they would draw their conclusions, partly theoretical and partly practical. For instance, having studied a store of facts concerning differences of opinion and belief, they would come to the conclusion that it is impossible to have any certain knowledge universally valid for all.

17.2.4 The Goal of Philosophical Enquiry

Because they were knowledge skeptics, the Sophists did not aim to establish objective norms or discover necessary truths from their investigations. Here, again, they differed from the early Greek philosophers whose primary aim was finding out the truth. The cosmologists wanted to find out the objective truth about the world. The Sophists, on the other hand did not expect to reach objective truth, but only relative, subjective truth. They set themselves the modest task of teaching the art and control of life. In other words, their goal was practical, not speculative.

17.2.5 The Significance of Sophist Thought

The sophistic movement of 5th century BC represents a phase of transition. It reveals a growing distrust of the power of human reason to solve the riddle of the universe and a consequent lack of faith in traditional values and institutions. This movement is radically skeptical and revolutionary; it is indifferent and even hostile to metaphysical speculation; in calling attention to the problem of man, however, it necessitates a thorough examination of the problem of human knowledge and conduct, and ushers in the Socratic period.

On the positive side, we might note that the Sophists made philosophy accessible to the common man, turned attention away from the contemplation of external nature to man himself. Secondly, they fostered the spirit of critical reflection on all fields of human life and thought. They compelled philosophers to examine the thinking process itself and this led to the formulation of a theory of knowledge. Likewise, their use of logical fallacies and sophisms made it necessary to study the correct laws of thought. In time, this led to the development of dialectic (Plato) and logic (Aristotle). In the same way radical criticism of the common notions of right and wrong, of public and private justice compelled a reexamination of the foundations of ethics and politics.

On balance, then, it must be conceded that the Sophists were a great educative force in Hellas. They forced philosophy to be built upon more solid foundations, to examine more closely the fundamental concepts of knowledge, truth, right and wrong, the meaning and purpose of human institutions and religion.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the epistemological position of Sophists.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) Write a short note on Sophist's ethics.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

17.3 MAJOR SOPHIST PHILOSOPHERS

17.3.1 Protagoras

Protagoras was born about 481 BC at Abdera in Thrace. He is believed to have come to Athens sometime by the middle of the century. Pericles entrusted him with the task of drawing up a constitution for the colony of Thurio, founded in 444 BC. He was back at Athens in 431 and during the plague in 430 which killed two of Pericles' sons. The story

goes that Protagoras was charged with blasphemy because of his book on the gods, fled the country before trial, and was drowned on the crossing to Sicily.

17.3.1.1 Epistemology

Protagoras is best known for his dictum: “Man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, of things that are not that they are not”. Controversy surrounded the precise signification of the terms ‘man’ and ‘things’. Does ‘man’ refer to individual man or man in the specific sense? Does ‘things’ mean physical objects only or does it include objects of thought (eg. ethical values) as well? In Plato’s *Theaetetus*, the above saying of Protagoras is interpreted in the individualistic sense in regard to sense perception. When the same wind is blowing, one may feel chilly, another not. Socrates asks if we should agree with Protagoras and say that the wind is cold to the one who feels chilly and not to the other. From this it is clear that Protagoras is taken to mean the individual man, and not man in the specific sense. Moreover, it is to be noted that the Sophist does not mean that the wind *appears* cold, but that it *is* cold to one man’s sense perception, while to another’s it *is not*.

17.3.1.2 Ethics

Against this interpretation it is pointed out that in the *Protagoras* of Plato, the Sophist is not represented as applying his dictum to ethical values in the individualistic sense. One might say, in answer to this objection, that what is true of objects of sense perception need not necessarily be true of ethical values. If, however, it is further objected that since Protagoras uses the term ‘all things’, he must be taken to mean both objects of sense perception and objects of abstract, conceptual thought and intuition (= values). This objection can be countered in two ways. First, it is far from clear whether Protagoras intended to bring together both material and spiritual objects under the term ‘all things’. Secondly, objects of sense perception (= material objects) are of a kind that *cannot* become the subject of true and universal knowledge whereas ethical values are of a kind that *can* become the subject of true and universal knowledge. This was the view of Plato himself. Not that Protagoras subscribed to such a view; he did not. But point is that sense perception, and intuition of values do not stand or fall together in relation to certain knowledge and truth for all.

We still have to find out Protagoras’ actual teaching in regard to ethical judgments and values. In the *Theaetetus* he does set forth a relativistic view of ethical judgments that is characteristic of his theory of knowledge: he declares that whatever practices seem right and praiseworthy to any particular State are so for that State. At the same time, he also urges that the wise man should attempt to substitute sound practices for unsound. In other words, all kinds of ethical views are true relatively, yet some may be ‘sounder’ (= more useful, expedient) than others and it is beauty of the wise man to promote these sounder practices. When we come to the *Protagoras* we find in the Sophist’s words hints of a natural law common to all men. Plato depicts him as saying that the gods have bestowed on all men a proper sense of righteousness, moderation and respect for others, which are absolutely necessary for the existence and functioning of the State; otherwise the State would not exist at all. This is a peculiar domain of human activity that is quite different from all others. For instance, a city could function properly even if only a few possessed musical skills, but it would not, if only a few citizens possessed a proper sense of rights and obligations enjoined by just laws. Now, does this contradict the relativism of *Theaetetus*? What Protagoras seems to mean is this: law in general is founded on certain ethical tendencies implanted in all men, but that the differences of law found in individual States are relative. On this view, the law of one State will not be ‘truer’ than the law of another State, but it may be ‘sounder’. The State of city community would be the determiner of

law, and not the individual. Yet, its laws will only be relatively true with reference to the legal code of another State, no more true or no less. Now, Protagoras was an upholder of tradition and social convention. He laid great emphasis on the importance of education, of imbibing the ethical traditions of the State while admitting that the wise man may lead the State to the formulation of 'better' laws. As far as the individual citizen is concerned, the proper course is to be faithful to tradition, to the accepted code of the community. This is so because no one 'way' is 'truer' than another. It is as though Protagoras would say: do not set up your private judgment against the law of the State, for no one code is 'truer' than another. In this way, Protagoras is able to reconcile his relativism with respect for tradition and custom, a relativism that had seemed to many to be intentionally revolutionary.

17.3.1.3 Religious Ideas

Of Protagoras' work *On the gods* only a fragment has come down to us. In this extract he expresses a characteristic skepticism regarding the existence and nature of gods. Such a statement may easily be interpreted as subversive of faith in religion. In fact, however, this is not so. In the *Protagoras* the Sophist recommends submission to one's inherited faith just as he advocated obedience to the laws of the State and for much the same reason: if we cannot be certain of absolute truth, why throw out the religion of our fathers! At any rate, Protagoras' attitude is not really so destructive as believers of a dogmatic faith might suppose. The fact of the matter is that Greek religion was not based on a reasoned faith; its main thrust was worship rather than dogmatic affirmations and negations. Although the general tendency of sophist thought was to weaken men's trust in tradition, Protagoras personally was a conservative in temper and had no intention of educating revolutionaries. On the contrary he claimed that his task was to educate good citizens. Ethical tendencies innate in all men can only come to fruition in organized societies. A good citizen should, therefore, strive to realize this aim by absorbing the social tradition. This tradition is not absolute truth, but it is the norm for a good citizen.

17.3.1.4 Eristic

As regards eristic practices, Protagoras' views stem directly from his relativistic theory. On every subject, he argued, it was possible to have more than one opinion. The dialectician and rhetorician would do well to develop different opinions and arguments. He would shine best when he made the weaker side appear the better. Enemies of sophism have interpreted this to mean making the morally worse cause appear the better. However, by 'weaker side', Protagoras did not necessarily mean a morally worse side. In a court case this could mean presenting the case of a man who is too weak to defend himself, or presenting a case the justice of which it is difficult to establish with hard evidence. It is true that in the hands of unscrupulous rhetoricians and lawyers, this principle easily degenerated into unscrupulous advocacy; but such a motive could not be attributed to Protagoras.

17.3.1.5 Linguistics

Protagoras led the way in the study of the science of grammar. His distinctive contribution relates to classification of different kinds of sentence and the terminology of genders of nouns.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Explain the epistemological position of Protagoras.

.....
...
.....
.....
.....
.....

17.3.2 Prodicus

Prodicus was a native of the island of Ceos in the Aegean. Like most of his compatriots, he is said to have possessed a pessimistic disposition. In the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Axiochus* it is said that he considered death desirable as it afforded an escape from the evils of life. Fear of death, he argued, is irrational because death concerns neither the living nor the dead. The basis of this argument is the notion that life and death are mutually exclusive. Prodicus' chief contribution was in the area of theogony. In the beginning men worshipped natural objects – sun, moon, rivers, lakes, fruits etc. - as gods because these were useful to them. The cult of the Nile in Egypt was an example of this practice. The next stage was worship of inventors of various arts and crafts – agriculture, viniculture, metal work etc. So they had such deities like Demeter, Dionysus, Hephaestus. This view rendered prayer superfluous and for this reason, Prodicus got into trouble with authorities at Athens. Like Protagoras, Prodicus too was interested in the study of language. He wrote a treatise on synonyms. His style was markedly pedantic.

17.3.3 HIPPIAS

A younger contemporary of Protagoras, Hippias of Elis was a polymath, being well versed in mathematics, astronomy, grammar and rhetoric, music, literature, history and mythology. He prided himself on his sartorial skills. His list of the Olympic victors paved the way for the later Greek system of dating by means of the Olympiads. In the *Protagoras*, Plato attributes to him the view that law is the tyrant of men, which forces them to do many things contrary to nature. It appears that Hippias wanted to draw attention to laws of the city state that were at variance with natural laws.

17.3.4 Gorgias

A Sicilian by birth, Gorgias came to Athens in 427 BC as ambassador of his native State. He was a champion of panhellenism.

Gorgias' early interests were the philosophy of Empedocles and natural sciences. It is generally believed that he wrote a book on *Optics*. Later, he was attracted to skepticism by the dialectic of Zeno and published a book entitled *On Not-being or Nature*. It is learned from this work that Gorgias reacted to the Eleatic dialectic differently from Protagoras. While the latter held that everything is true, Gorgias asserted an absolute nihilism. The three cardinal propositions of this doctrine are the following: (1) Nothing exists; (2) If there

were anything, then it could not be known; (3) Even if there were knowledge of being, this knowledge could not be imparted.

It need hardly be said that these ideas struck one as being provocative in the extreme. But did Gorgias seriously offer it as his metaphysics? Some thought he did. Others took it as a joke intended to show what can be done by a clever use of words. It may well be that Gorgias wished to employ the Eliatic dialectic in order to render Eliatic philosophy meaningless. Afterwards, Gorgias renounced philosophy and turned to rhetoric.

Gorgias saw that to master rhetorical art one had to master the art of persuasion and this required a close study of practical psychology. He deliberately practiced the art of suggestion which could be used for both practical and artistic ends. With regard to artistic use Gorgias proposed the concept of justifiable deception, of which tragedy was an obvious example. Tragedy's power over the spectator is compared to the effect of purgatives which reminds one of Aristotle's theory of Katharsis.

17.3.5 Some Other Sophists

Amongst the lesser figures of the Sophist movement one might mention Callimachus who put forward the 'might is right' doctrine; Lycophron who asserted that nobility is a sham, that all men are equal; Thrasymachus of Chalcedon who figures in the *Republic* as the brutal champion of the rights of the stronger; and Antiphon of Athens who denounced the distinction between nobles and commons, Greeks and barbarians as itself a barbarism.

Check Your Progress III

- Note:**
- a) Use the space provided for your answer.
 - b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. State the philosophical thoughts of Prodicus.

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. What are the philosophical contributions of Hippas and Gorgias?

.....

.....

.....

.....

17.4 LET US SUM UP

We have already seen how some of the sophists held a relativistic view on cognition and knowledge. Their philosophy contains criticism of religion, law, and ethics. Though many sophists were apparently as religious as their contemporaries, some held atheistic or agnostic views. In some cases, such as Gorgias, there are original rhetorical works that are fortunately extant, allowing the author to be judged on his own terms. In most cases,

however, knowledge of sophist thought comes from fragmentary quotations that lack context. Many of these quotations come from Aristotle, who seems to have held the sophists in slight regard, notwithstanding his other disagreements with Plato. Owing largely to the influence of Plato and Aristotle, philosophy came to be regarded as distinct from sophistry, the latter being regarded as rhetoric, a practical discipline. Thus, by the time of the Roman Empire, a sophist was simply a teacher of rhetoric and a popular public speaker.

17.5 KEY WORDS

Judgment: Judgment is an act of the intellect in which we say something of an object by way of affirmation or denial

Rhetoric: Rhetoric is the art of using language as a means to persuade. Along with grammar and logic or dialectic, rhetoric is one of the three ancient arts of discourse. From ancient Greece to the late 19th Century, it was a central part of Western education, filling the need to train public speakers and writers to move audiences to action with arguments.

17.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Barnes, Jonathan. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Penguin Books, 1987.

Borchert, Donald M. ed. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vols. 4, 8 & 9. New York: Thomson Gale, 2006.

Burnet, John. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1930.

Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*. Vo. I. New York: Image Books, Doubleday, London, 1993.

Craig, Edward, ed. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vols. 4, 7 & 9. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

Gomperz, Theodore. *Greek Thinker: A History of Ancient Philosophy*. Tr. Laurie Magnus.

London: John Murray Publishers, 1980.

Marias, Julian. *History of Philosophy*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1967. Roochnik, David. *Retrieving the Ancients: An Introduction to Greek Philosophy*.

Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2004.

Sedley, David, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Thilly, Frank. *A History of Philosophy*. Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1981. Walsh, Martin. *A History of Philosophy*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985.

17.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1. Knowledge depends upon the particular knower, that what seems true to him *is* true for him, that there is no objective truth, but only subjective opinion. There may be as many views of the same thing as there are individuals, yet all will be true. Thus, there is no point in attempting to demonstrate *the* truth of a statement that is acceptable to all. To fix a truth that is valid for all and for all times is to go against the very nature of reality which is in constant flux. Thus anything and everything can be equally true or false at the same time depending on the experience of various individuals.

For Protagoras, two mutually contradictory statements might be equally true. But one might be 'better' than the other - one view might be more normal or natural than the other. For Gorgias, in any case of conflict of opinions, none is true. He supports this in three paradoxical statements: (1) there is nothing; (2) even if there were something, we could not know it; (3) even if it existed and we could know it, we could not communicate this knowledge to others.

2. If knowledge of reality is impossible, then knowledge of right and wrong is impossible; there is no universal right and wrong so that each person is free to make ethical choices according to his conscience.

The older Sophist Protagoras declared all institutions, including law and morality, to be merely conventional. However, he recognized the necessity of legal and moral rules for social order.

The younger Sophists argued that the foundation of ethics is mere convention and arbitrary agreement among men. Some maintained that laws were made by the "weak" in order to prevent the "best" from getting their due. Others held that laws were made to subserve class interests, to promote the interests of minority of privileged individuals.

Check Your Progress II

1. The epistemological position of Protagoras can be presented in his won saying: "Man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, of things that are not that they are not". But the questions are: Does 'man' refer to individual man or man in the specific sense? Does 'things' mean physical objects only or does it include objects of thought (eg. ethical values) as well?

For example, When the same wind is blowing, one may feel chilly, another not. This means the wind is cold to the one who feels chilly and not to the other. From this it is clear that Protagoras is taken to mean the individual man, and not man in the specific sense. Moreover, the Sophist does not mean that the wind *appears* cold, but that it *is* cold to one man's sense perception, while to another's it *is not*.

Check Your Progress III

1. Prodicus considered death desirable as it afforded an escape from the evils of life. Fear of death, he argued, is irrational because death concerns neither the living nor the dead. The basis of this argument is the notion that life and death are mutually exclusive.

His chief contribution was in the area of theogony. In the beginning men worshipped

natural objects – sun, moon, rivers, lakes, fruits etc. - as gods because these were useful to them. The next stage was worship of inventors of various arts and crafts – agriculture, viniculture, metal work etc. So they had such deities like Demeter, Dionysus, Hephaestus.

2. For Hippias, law is the tyrant of men, which forces them to do many things contrary to nature. It appears that Hippias wanted to draw attention to laws of the city state that were at variance with natural laws.

Gorgias proposed absolute nihilism. The three cardinal propositions of this doctrine are the following: (1) Nothing exists; (2) If there were anything, then it could not be known; (3) Even if there were knowledge of being, this knowledge could not be imparted.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 18

SOCRATES*

Structure

18.0 Objectives

18.1 Introduction

18.2 Socratic Problem

18.3 Socratic Method

18.4 Epistemology

18.5 Socratic Ethics

18.6 Socratic Schools

18.7 Let Us Sum Up

18.8 Key Words

18.9 Further Readings and References

18.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

18.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we explain the basic philosophy of Socrates: Socratic problem, Socratic Method, his epistemology and his ethics, and Socratic School such as Cynicism, Cyrenaic School, The School of Megara and the Elian and Eretrian Schools.

By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- Heighten your critical thinking
- Develop your own personal investigation and reasoned argument for answering life questions
- Comprehend Socratic Method
- Apply his ethical principles in one's life

18.1 INTRODUCTION

Socrates was born in Athens in 469 and lived over a span of seventy years filling entirely the second half of fifth century B.C Athens' cultural life. He died at the age of 70 in 399. He was the son of a sculptor and a midwife. He used to say that his art, like his mother's, was midwifery, the art of delivering children in the name of truth. The voice of Socrates was

* Dr. Sebastian Palamutatil, St. Joseph Pontifical Institute, Aluwa. This unit is taken from BPY-003 (Unit 4, Block 2).

taken to be the voice of one's conscience. This indicates that he was considered a man of God and, to some extent, a mystic. He was also a devote citizen of Athens. He lived his adult life in Athens engaging in open philosophical discussion which often included questions of ethics, religion, and politics.

Socrates went against the traditional way of accepting the authorities of respected poets such as Homer, Hesiod and others as the proper foundations for answering question about the aforementioned topics. He insisted, instead, that personal investigation and reasoned argument alone could constitute a proper basis for answering these questions. He believed that he had been given a divine mission for acquiring knowledge by questioning every so-called wise man or in other words the authority and traditions. His divine mission of search for knowledge by questioning wise men brought him into trouble. His search for knowledge led to him to the acceptance of one supreme God, which was not consistent with the then Greek notions of God. Social authorities and considered this as destructive because, according to them, it involved subverting accepted beliefs. As a consequence he had to face trial before the popular court for the following three charges:

1. For denying the national gods
2. For setting up of new gods
3. For corrupting the youths.

Although he denied all these charges in defense, he was condemned to death in 399. The last words of this great Athenian Master were: "Now it is time that we were going, I to die and you to live, but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but God."

18.2 SOCRATIC PROBLEM

Although his opposition to the blind acceptance of tradition and authority allied him with Sophists such as Protagoras, Gorgias and Prodicus, he was far more committed to know the inner man than the Sophists. Unlike the Sophists, he was in search for the truth and knowledge about the universal validity of the moral laws. For Socrates, this search was intimately connected with the chief problem of knowing what man is. The inscription at Delphi, "man, know thyself" haunted him constantly.

"I can't as yet 'know myself', as the inscription at Delphi enjoins, and so long as that ignorance remains it seems to me ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters. Consequently I don't bother about such things, but accept the current beliefs about them, and direct my inquiries, as I have just said, rather to myself." *Phaedrus* 230a.

Although for the Sophists *homo mensura* (man is the measure) was the maxim as to the acquisition of knowledge, the testimonies of Protagoras and Gorgias proved that no valid knowledge about the truth of the universal validity of moral laws was possible. Socrates was dissatisfied with this sophistic position. For Socrates knowing one's own self implied an extensive analysis of knowledge.

This analysis aims at determining three things.

1. The universal validity of moral principle;
2. The laws of the State;
3. The nature of religious faith.

With regard to these points Socrates did not accept any previous philosophical positions, predominantly that of the Sophists. Socrates accused the Sophists that instead of giving importance to reason, they gave importance to perception. He again charged that they did not distinguish between reason and perception and reason and feeling. Consequently, Sophists ended up in skepticism and nihilism as regards epistemology and conventionalism in morality and politics. Hence, Socrates task was to present a far more universally valid

knowledge as well as universally valid moral and political laws. The inquiry into the possibility of universal knowledge as well as universal moral and political laws led him to believe that that virtue is the knowledge of the good through concepts. Concepts are formed by reason which is one and the same for all people. Thus, he concludes that if virtue is the knowledge through concepts and if concepts are formed by reason which is one and same in all, then knowledge is universal; so are moral and political laws. But how do we attain this? In what follows we discuss his method of attaining universally valid knowledge.

18.3 SOCRATIC METHOD

Socrates insisted that personal investigations and reasoned arguments alone could constitute a proper basis for answering questions about the universality of knowledge as well as the universality of moral and political laws. In Socrates' case this personal investigations and reasoned arguments assume a conversational form i.e., a form of dialogue. This dialogue, however, was limited to ethical subject-matter alone, therefore it included the justice, virtue, knowledge, temperance etc. The principal aim of such a dialogue was to know his own self. He called it the method of "elenchus," the Greek for 'putting to the test' or 'refutation.' This dialogue consisted in skillfully questioning others who claim to be wise men and drawing out their views with regards to virtue, justice, and so on. The objective of such dialogue was to show the inadequacies of their views which would in turn reveal that those who claimed to know really did not know. Thus, Socrates believed that by such a method he could show that he was wiser than others inasmuch as he knew that he did not know. Socratic method has two particular dimensions. First, regarding its modus operandi, it is dialectical; second, regarding its aim, it is *maieutiké* or midwifery method.

18.3.1 Dialectical Method

The dialectical method is an art of argument by skilful questions and answer, the aim of which is to arrive at answers with the fewest possible words which should be precise and to the point. The first stage of such a method usually started with a generally accepted statement with regard to the subject-matter. This generally accepted statement is called hypothesis. This is followed by an anti-thesis, which might show the absurd consequences of the hypothesis. At the second stage the dialectic method is supposed to lead to the contradiction of the hypothesis and its possible rejection. The rejection of one hypothesis, might lead to the acceptance of another hypothesis which contains less contradictions. Thus, by the dialectical method the investigator is led on to newer hypotheses with fewer and fewer contradictions. Socrates himself never found any absolutely correct answer to the questions about ethics and conduct of life. But it did not mean that the dialectical method was a fruitless one. For Socrates it was a passionate love of the philosopher of reaching absolute knowledge. For, according to Socrates, absolute knowledge lies in constant search and not in reaching and grasping one. Thus, it seems that the aim of the dialectical method was to show that philosophy for Socrates is a search for wisdom and not to arrive at the absolute knowledge.

18.3.2 Midwifery Method

Although he followed and advocated dialectical method, he called his method "midwifery". Although it has allusions to his mother whose profession was midwifery, what he meant by this was his intention of getting others to produce true ideas in their mind, so that they might do right action. "He wanted to give birth to true ideas in the clear form of definition, not for a speculative but for a practical end."

18.4 EPISTEMOLOGY

As we have seen, Socrates was dissatisfied with all branches of previous philosophy, particularly philosophy of knowledge. For him previous conceptions of knowledge were presumptive, relative and conventional. He opposed them and directed his capabilities to proving the emptiness of the previous scheme of knowledge. As we have seen already the Socratic problem was about to find out universal valid knowledge. At the same time his philosophical enquiry was ethical in character, which aims at the discovery of his own self. Hence, one could easily conclude that by knowledge Socrates meant the knowledge of justice, virtue and eternal or religious ideas. Socrates believed that real knowledge of justice, virtue and eternal ideas are already present in man. This knowledge is dormant and waiting to be recalled by skilful questioning. How this knowledge is present in man? This question led Socrates to believe in the immortality of the soul. For, he seemed to have believed that the immortality of the soul would enable man to have real knowledge about justices, virtue and eternal ideas. Since soul is immortal it “has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed.” But, how do we become aware of this already present knowledge in us? Here we find the structure of Socratic epistemology. Aristotle categorically states in *Metaphysics* that we owe two things to Socrates: “inductive reasoning and universal definition.” Here we find the structure of Socratic epistemology: knowledge is achieved through inductive reasoning and universal definition. Thus, according to Socrates, both universal definition and inductive reasoning are the means of reawakening knowledge which is dormant in all human beings.

18.4.1 Definition

We have seen that Socratic Method is conversational in which questions are put forward to get appropriate answers. When Socrates asks a question, he asks *What is*, for example justice. He is asking for a definition rather than a mere answer. To define a thing is to state what it is, its *essence*. Thus, definition leads to *essence*. Since definition leads to *essence*, knowing to define a thing means knowing that thing. It was a new approach to knowledge, which leads one to say what things are, to discover their *essence*. Such an approach was absent among previous thinkers, namely the Sophists, although the Eleatic philosophy held it be their prime concern. “From this point originates all the fertility of Socrates’ thinking, turning toward the quest of truth, centered ...in the view point of being, from which the Sophists had turned away.” It is, thus, argued that in Socrates there is an attempt to return to study what realities really are.

18.4.2 Induction

By Socratic induction is not meant what later logicians, such as Francis Bacon and John Stuart Mill, understood as induction. As has been already seen, in contrast to the Sophists, Socrates did not depend on perception alone as source of knowledge. Perceptive knowledge may lead to relative knowledge, according Socrates. His inquiry aims at the absolute knowledge and not relative one. Since for Socrates knowledge is achieved through concept, he made sharp distinction between perception and conception. By concept is meant the universal idea of a class, for example, cowness for the class of cows. But, mere observation of a number of particular things cannot yield the conception of cowness. Then, how do we form a concept of it?

A concept is formed by a recollection or intuition of the universal which may happen quite suddenly. In Plato’s *Phaedo* Socrates seems to suggest that this recollection takes place as if

re- discovering a long-forgotten thing rather suddenly. Recollection is something like an intuition of a mystic. Socrates was really a mystic and for him knowledge is to be found in mystic intuition of universals. Although, perception plays the role of the prompting agent, he warns that senses are really more of hindrance than a help in the realization of universal idea.

“Surely the soul can best reflect when it is free of all distractions such as hearing or sight or pain or pleasure of any kind- that is, when it ignores the body and becomes as far as possible independent, avoiding all contacts and associations as much as it can, in its search for reality.”

He even held that only after leaving the body, a seeker of knowledge will have wisdom in its fullness and purity. Nevertheless, in this life one can attain true knowledge provided he leads a life of mortification of the body. Thus, Socrates even proposes a kind of asceticism for the attainment of true knowledge which enables one to conduct his life in the light of moral, religious and political laws.

18.5 SOCRATIC ETHICS

Socrates ethics is principally concerned with man. Although this concern was not new in the early Greek philosophical traditions, Socrates considered man from a different point of view. The core of Socrates’ ethics is the concept of virtue. Virtue, according to Socrates, is the deepest and most basic propensity of man. This virtue is *knowledge*.

“... if there exists any good thing different, and not associated with knowledge, virtue will not necessarily be any form of knowledge. If on the other hand knowledge embraces everything that is good, we shall be right to suspect that virtue is knowledge.”

If virtue is knowledge it can be known and consequently taught. This is the meaning of the imperative “know yourself.” Know yourself means bring your inner self to light. Through knowledge man gains possession of himself whereby he becomes his own master.

18.5.1 Virtue is Knowledge

According to Socrates virtue is the highest aim and greatest good one has to seek in the life. He also insisted that if it is to be highest aim and the greatest good it must have universal consistence and be the same for all. Now, what is universally consistent and the same for all is knowledge which is obtained through concept by the use of reason which is common in all. The relation between virtue and knowledge is inseparable. For Socrates thinks that health, wealth, beauty, courage, temperance etc., which are customarily considered to be various forms of good, are good only if they are guided by wisdom; if guided by folly they could be considered forms of evil.

As has been already seen, concepts are given by reason and not by perception of particular facts. Since concepts are already in human mind, they need to be enkindled by questioning. If morality is the knowledge of the idea of good through concepts, then who can obtain this? Socrates held that the Sophists did not obtain it, because they depended on perception rather than reason. He believed that the seeker who follows the dictates of reason rather than perception attains it. One who follows the dictates of the reason recollects the concepts of good already present in the mind. For, as in his epistemology, the real concept of good is always a matter of recollection by means of reflection on the idea of good.

18.5.2 Virtue is One or The Unity of Virtue

Ethics, according to Socrates, has yet another dimension. It does not stop at mere acquisition

of the knowledge of the ideas of good. The knowledge of the idea of the good aims at controlling all other ideas and ultimately guides the whole man, including his will and feeling, and necessarily leads him to good actions. Hence ethical knowledge tends to culture the soul which ultimately leads the soul towards regaining its pure, pristine glory. For Socrates this is for this reason for believing that “no one does wrong knowingly” and “that knowledge is virtue.”

Socrates says that virtue or goodness is one, although practices differently in different forms of good. In Plato’s *Protagoras* Socrates says that although wisdom, temperance, courage, justice and holiness are the principal forms of virtue, there is one single reality which underlies them all. Yet on another occasion, in Plato’s *Meno*, we find Socrates looking for one virtue which permeates all other virtues.

Socrates explained this by means of an example of a healthy body. According to him all kinds of bodily excellence follow from one single health of the body, similarly, all kinds of virtue follow from the health of the soul. What is meant by the health of the soul? The soul has different functions. The health of the soul follows from orderly arrangement of these different functions. In Plato’s *Gorgias*, we see Socrates saying that the functions of the soul are reasoning, temper, and desire. The function of reasoning aims at attaining wisdom, temper means the courage, and desire is the soberness. The health of the souls depends on the organized relation that these functions hold to each other. An orderly arrangement of these functions is something like the following. Wisdom commands and temper assists in the execution of these commands, while desire furnishes the material basis for the actualization of these commands. The aim of the oneness or unity of the virtue is the ultimate happiness of the individual. “A successful functioning of the harmonious activities under the regulation of reason yields happiness.” Thus the Socratic notion of virtue as one means “the self of a good man is an organic unity of all its functions.”

The Socratic notion of virtue as one leads us finally to conclude that there is one Idea of the Good which underlies all the ethical activities of man which are intrinsically good. Socrates speaks in the Plato’s *Republic* that...in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that when seen must need point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss briefly on Socratic method.

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. Explain the Socrates’ philosophy of ethics.

.....

.....

.....

18.6 SOCRATIC SCHOOLS

Socrates' dream was to enlighten the minds of men so that they might be able to follow the dictates of their inner self through self-investigation and questioning all sources of knowledge. But he did not found any school nor did he write a single word so that his dream might be perpetuated either through institutions or through words. "But various thinkers, who had been disciples of Socrates to a greater or lesser extent, emphasized one or other point in his teachings, combining it also with elements culled from other sources" founded various schools in the name of Socrates. Although he did not found any school, he left behind a Socratic circle, among them his famous pupil Plato, who founded the Academy. If we leave aside Plato, the members of the Socratic circle who left a succession behind them are Antisthenes, Aristippus of Cyrene, Euclides of Megara and Phaedo of Elis. They are considered respectively as the founders of Cynicism, Cyrenaic School, Megarian School, and Elian School. It is these groups that are traditionally known as the Socratic schools. In what follows, a brief sketch of each of these schools is given.

18.6.1 Cynicism

Cynicism originated in the mid-fourth century BC and it was arguably the most original and influential branch of the Socratic tradition in antiquity. Antisthenes, a pupil of Socrates, and Diogenes of Sinope were considered to be founding fathers of Cynicism. Cynicism is noted for its radical re-examination of the animal nature of the human being. Cynics, which is a nickname self-imposed on the founders of Cynicism, literally means 'doglike' or 'disciples of the dog.'

Cynicism made use of innovative and influential literary tradition of satire, parody and aphorism in order to spoil the dominant ideologies of the time. It proposed a new morality mainly based on two things: first, by minimizing creaturely needs in pursuit of self-sufficiency and second, by maximizing both freedom of speech and freedom of action. The former is achieved by physical training and the later by open defiance of the well-established social taboos. They followed an anti-politics which sees existing governments as a betrayal of human nature. Cynics considered traditional culture as an obstacle to happiness. Cynics advocated an immediate relationship to nature and proposed that man is the 'citizen of the cosmos'.

The Cynics made concerted attempt to demonstrate that happiness does not depend on society or on any other circumstances, but wholly on the autonomous self which is achieved by Cynics' discipline based on exemplary acts and corporeal training. The Cynics defaced the value which philosophers attached to theoretical disciplines as well as the conventional value which society attached to such externals as money, status, family and political power.

If cynics had a different conception of morality and conditions for happiness, it was because they differed in their conception of the human being. Diogenes of Sinope gave a different picture of man than that had been traditionally held to be the ideal. Diogenes held an extreme version of cynicism. He believed that human beings are animals who have much to learn about freedom and self-sufficiency from their fellow creatures. It is argued that the use of animals as examples served to illustrate the intrinsic superiority of nature to culture. Diogenes even preferred to live like dogs. It was to demonstrate that this would enable man to test the limits of his species by living like a dog and to realize the unlimitedness of freedom that animals are enjoying.

18.6.2 The Cyrenaic School

Aristippus of Cyrene founded the Cyrenaic School. He was born about 435 B.C. In Cyrene he seems to have become acquainted with the teaching of Protagoras and afterward, while he was in Athens, he was in relation with Socrates. Aristippus held that our sensation alone gives us certain knowledge. This is in sharp contrast to the Socratic notion that it is concepts of universals and not perceptions of particulars which provides us with certain knowledge. If sensation alone gives us certain knowledge, then the purpose of such knowledge should be to obtain pleasure.

Aristippus taught that sensation consists in movement. When the movement is gentle, the sensation is pleasurable; when it is rough, there is pain; when movement is imperceptible or when there is no movement at all, there is neither pleasure nor pain. The rough movement cannot be the ethical end. Ethical end cannot consist in the neutrality of the absence of movement. It consists in the gentle movement which produces pleasure. Thus, pleasure become the ethical end of human conduct.

Pleasure, then, according to Aristippus, is the end of life. What kind of pleasure constitutes the end of life? Aristippus says that positive and present pleasure is the end of life. The Cyrenaics believed that the bodily pleasure alone is the positive and present pleasure. If the Cyrenaics held that bodily pleasure alone is the end of life, then could they not be considered and pure hedonists? Indeed, as it seems from the earliest traditions, they were aware of this charge. Hence, Aristippus, admonishes his followers that “the wise man take cognizance of the future.” The wise man, in order to preserve cheerfulness and contentment, will limit his desires. This precautionary attitude of Aristippus points to the fact that although the pleasure is the ethical end of life, “wise man needs the judgment in order to enable him evaluate the different pleasures of life.”

Thus, we can find an apparent contradiction the teaching of Aristippus; a contradiction between the principle of pleasure and the principle of judgment. This contradiction led to a divergence of views among his disciples such as *Thoedorus the Atheist*, *Hegesias*, and *Anniceris*. All of them held different views and different interpretations of the original teaching of their master.

18.6.3 The School of Megara

The Megarian school was founded by Euclides of Megara. He was intimate associate of Socrates, but prior to his association with Socrates he had been influenced by the Eleatic philosophy. Thus, the main doctrines of this school were both ethical and metaphysical. Their main ethical doctrine was the unity of good. Euclides held that “the good is one thing, called by many names: sometimes wisdom, sometimes god, and at other times intellect etc.” He denied the existence of its supposed opposites. It is argued that Euclides built this upon the Socratic ethical conception that virtue is one and Parmenidean “metaphysical thesis that all names, even those supposedly opposite to each other, in reality refer to a single being.”

18.6.4 The Elian and Eretrian Schools

According to reliable traditions, these schools were founded by one of Socrates’s associates, Phaedo of Elis and an Eretrian called Menedemus of Eretria. Hence the name the Elian and Eretrian School. Phaedo of Elis seems to have been influenced by the Megarian School in his use of dialectics, whereas Menedemus was primarily interested in the Socratic-Megarian ethics, holding the unity of virtue and knowledge.

For Socrates virtue is knowledge and knowledge is based of the Idea of Good. Thus, for

Socrates “morality is the universal knowledge of the Good. For good is advantageous for man and contributes to his happiness.” What is happiness then? We are told that Socrates never said anything definite about Good and happiness. This ambiguity that Socrates had left behind led to various interpretations. We have already seen some of them. Yet, there are some traditions that bear remote affinity to Socrates, but in an extremely exaggerated manner. We mention two of them, namely, Stoicism and Epicureanism. The philosophers of Stoic school are intrinsically related to the earlier ethical philosophers in the Socratic tradition, especially to the Cynics. The centre of Stoic concern is man, the wise man. Epicureanism, on the other hand, is an extreme exaggeration of Socrates view of happiness as the end of ethics. They developed this notion in the hedonistic line.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Write a short note on Cynicism.

.....
.....
.....
.....

2. What is the basic teaching of the Cyrenaic school?

.....
.....
.....
.....

18.7 LET US SUM UP

As we have seen, Socrates was a Classical Greek philosopher. Credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy, he is an enigmatic figure known only through the classical accounts of his students. Plato’s dialogues are the most comprehensive accounts of Socrates to survive from antiquity. Through his portrayal in Plato’s dialogues, Socrates has become renowned for his contribution to the field of ethics, and it is this Platonic Socrates who also lends his name to the concepts of Socratic irony and the Socratic method, or *elenchus*. The latter remains a commonly used tool in a wide range of discussions, and is a type of pedagogy in which a series of questions are asked not only to draw individual answers, but to encourage fundamental insight into the issue at hand. It is Plato’s Socrates that also made important and lasting contributions to the fields of epistemology and logic, and the influence of his ideas and approach remains strong in providing a foundation for much western philosophy that followed.

18.8 KEY WORDS

Enigma: An enigma is a puzzle, something mysterious or inexplicable, or a riddle or difficult problem. The word can also be used to describe a mysterious or secretive person.

Cynicism: Cynicism originally comprised the various philosophies of a group of ancient Greeks called the Cynics, founded by Antisthenes in about the 4th century BC. The Cynics

rejected all conventions, whether of religion, manners, housing, dress, or decency, advocating the pursuit of virtue in a simple and unmaterialistic lifestyle.

18.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Branham, Bracht, B. "Cynics" in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward Craig. Vol. 2.

Copleston, Frederick . *History of Philosophy*. Vol. 1. New York: Image Books, 1993.

Marias, Julian. *History of Philosophy*. New York: Dover Publication, 1966.

Masih, Y. *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*. Delhi,: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994. Reeve, C.D.C. *Socrates in the Apology*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.

Sedely, David. "Megarian School" in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward Craig. Vol. 6.

Tsouna, Voula. "Cynics" in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward Craig, Vol. 9. Vlastos, G. ed. *The Philosophy of Socrates*. New York: Doubleday,1971.

Vlastos, G. ed. *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

18.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1. Socratic method was called method of dialogue. He called it the method of "elenchus," the Greek for 'putting to the test' or 'refutation.' This dialogue consisted in skillfully questioning others who claim to be wise men and drawing out their views. The objective of such dialogue was to show the inadequacies of their views which would in turn reveal that those who claimed to know really did not know. It has two particular dimensions. First, regarding its modus operandi; it is dialectical; second, regarding its aim it is Maieutiké or midwifery method.

The dialectical method is an art of argument by skilful questions and answer, the aim of which is to arrive at answers with the fewest possible words which should be precise and to the point. The first stage of such a method usually started with a generally accepted statement (hypothesis) with regard to the subject-matter. This is followed by an anti- thesis, which might show the absurd consequences of the hypothesis. At the second stage the dialectic method is supposed to lead to the contradiction of the hypothesis and its possible rejection. The rejection of one hypothesis, might lead to the acceptance of another hypothesis which contains less contradictions. Thus, by the dialectical method the investigator is led on to newer hypotheses with fewer and fewer contradictions.

2. Socrates held the universality of morality. Socrates argument is that as reason is one and the same in all, so moral laws are universally valid. Moral laws are not based on one's

feeling and desires, but they are based on rational thought. Hence, there is an intrinsic connection between knowledge and ethics.

Socrates ethics is principally concerned with human. Its core is the concept of virtue. This virtue is *knowledge*. If virtue is knowledge it can be known and consequently taught. This is the meaning of the imperative “know yourself.” Know yourself means bring your inner self to light. Through knowledge man gains possession of himself whereby he becomes his own master. The knowledge of the idea of the good aims at controlling all other ideas and ultimately guides the whole man, including his will and feeling, and necessarily leads him to good actions. Hence ethical knowledge tends to culture the soul which ultimately leads the soul towards regaining its pure, pristine glory.

Check Your Progress II

1. Cynicism made use of innovative and influential literary tradition of satire, parody and aphorism in order to spoil the dominant ideologies of the time. It proposed a new morality mainly based on two things: first, by minimizing creaturely needs in pursuit of self-sufficiency and second, by maximizing both freedom of speech and freedom of action. The former is achieved by physical training and the later by open defiance of the well-established social taboos. They followed an anti-politics which sees existing governments as a betrayal of human nature. Cynics considered traditional culture as an obstacle to happiness.
2. Aristippus held that our sensation alone gives us certain knowledge. If sensation alone gives us certain knowledge, then the purpose of such knowledge should be to obtain pleasure. Pleasure is the end of life. Positive and present pleasure is the end of life. The Cyrenaics believed that the bodily pleasure alone is the positive and present pleasure. Hence, Aristippus, admonishes his followers that although the pleasure is the ethical end of life, “wise man needs the judgment in order to enable him evaluate the different pleasures of life.”