

8.10: ROMAN PHILOSOPHY AND LAW

Key terms: Epicureanism, Epicurus, Stoicism, Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, gods and goddesses, *Ius Civile*

PHILOSOPHY

- The Roman didn't produce much original philosophy.
- Many Romans were suspicious of philosophers and didn't appreciate arguments of moral and ethical questions.
- Many Roman philosophers spent much of their time explaining Greek philosophy to the Romans.
- Two principal schools of philosophy impacted Rome:
 - (1) Epicureanism
 - (2) Stoicism
- Both philosophies came from Greece.
- Epicurus (341–271 BC) founded the Epicurean school.
- According to Epicurus, the correct goal and principle of human actions is **pleasure**.
- While Epicureanism stressed moderation and prudence while seeking pleasure, Romans thought that the philosophy was Greek enthusiasm for self-indulgence and debauchery.
 - self-indulgent: doing what one wants, esp. with pleasure or idleness.
 - debauchery: excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures.
- Lucretius (99–55 BC), who tried to correct this misunderstanding, wrote *On the Nature of Things* (*De Rerum Natura*).
- He advocated the intellect and rationality of Epicureanism.
- Main teaching of Epicureanism: the gods, if they exist, play no part in human affairs or in the phenomena of nature.
- The Epicurean theory of matter, in physical terms: the universe is made up of two elements:
 - (1) small particles of matter (atoms)
 - (2) empty space
- Atoms form complex structures caused by random swerving in space—without interference from the gods!
- Therefore, human life can be lived in complete freedom.
- We can face natural disasters with peacefulness: they are outside our control.
 - earthquakes, plagues, etc.
- At death, atoms separate the body, mind, and soul.
- There is no immortality of the soul.
- So, in Epicureanism, there is neither fear of death nor threat of punishment in the future.
- The best of life was one of pleasure and calm composure.
- Epicureanism didn't appeal very much to the Romans.
- The hardheaded, practical, and moral Romans found more appeal in Stoicism.
- Stoicism: the other school of philosophy from Greece which came into Rome.
- Stoic teaching: the world was guided by Reason and that Divine Providence watched over the virtuous, never allowing them to suffer.

- The Stoic key to being virtuous: desire only what was under one's control.
- Riches, power, physical health were all subject to the whims of Fortune.
- Stoics believed what counted was what was subject to the person's will.
- By 1st cent. BC, Stoicism had a following in Rome (Cicero writes about it).
- Seneca (8 BC – AD 65) wrote several essays on Stoic morality.
 - He practiced moral courage and wrote about it when his former pupil, Nero, ordered him to commit suicide.
 - Taking one's life was approved by Stoic philosophers.
- Perhaps the most impressive Stoic writer of all: Epictetus (c. AD 50–134).
 - Epictetus was a former slave who founded a school of philosophy in Rome, then in Greece.
 - In his *Enchiridion* (*Handbook*), Epictetus writes that absolute trust in Divine should be kept through every misfortune.
- The teachings of Epictetus greatly influenced the last great Stoic, the emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180).
- Marcus Aurelius faced the dilemma of being a Stoic and an emperor at the same time.
 - This was a struggle between his public duty and his personal convictions.
- He wrote in his *Meditations* his attempt to live the life of a Stoic. It wasn't easy!
 - "Tell yourself every morning 'Today I shall meet the officious, the ungrateful, the bullying, the treacherous, the envious, the selfish. All of them behave like this because they do not know the difference between good and bad.'"
- Most Romans stayed away from the appeal of the philosophical life and were indifferent to it. [The majority of Romans' ... were indifferent to philosophy.]
- Superstitions of Stoicism and Epicureanism remained fixed in the Roman character.
- Festivals honoring the traditional gods were celebrated long after Christianity had come.

Principal Roman Deities and their Greek Equivalents:

Roman	Greek	Roman	Greek
Jupiter	Zeus	Diana	Artemis
Juno	Hera	Ceres	Demeter
Neptune	Poseidon	Venus	Aphrodite
Vulcan	Hephaestus	Minerva	Athena
Mars	Ares	Mercury	Hermes
Apollo	Apollo	Bacchus	Dionysus

- Rituals of reading the future by examining animal entrails continued to be popular.

LAW

- The earliest legal code of the Republic was the Law of the Twelve Tables (451–450 BC).
- By Julius Caesar's time it was mostly replaced.
- One of the most lasting achievements that Julius Caesar did was create a single unified code of civil law: the *Ius Civile*.
 - The science of law is one of the few original creations of Roman literature.

- Caesar's *Ius Civile* served as a model for later times.
- It was still used in the 6th cent. AD (by emperor Justinian!)
 - Justinian's *Iuris Civilis* greatly influenced the development of modern legal systems.
- Today, millions of people live in countries whose legal systems came from ancient Rome!
- In Britain it was once said that with Roman law: "there is not a problem of jurisprudence which it does not touch: there is scarcely a corner of political science on which its light has not fallen."
- Over the centuries, Roman law was developed and adapted to local conditions.
- Roman law was constantly changing and developing in the process.
- Legal experts were in great demand in Rome.
- Many jurists had reputations for wisdom and integrity.
- Throughout many years, Romans built up a body of legal opinion so comprehensive.
 - "Values valid for all times and places." "Equality for all."
- By the time Justinian was emperor, he was able to draw on a thousand years of practical wisdom.