

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Introduction

- **Outline of Lecture**
  - **1. Introduction: the Greek Belief in Order made the Difference**
  - **2. Frame of Reference**
  - **3. The World as an Intelligible Whole: the Greek Outlook**
  - **4. The Polis as the Context for Greek Life**
  - **5. Man and the Good Life in Greek Culture**
  - **6. Summary**
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Introduction

- Greek Achievements stemmed from the conviction that an eternal, perfect order underlies the world and that this order is intelligible to man’s intellect.
  - Greeks looked to a natural standard, not a supernatural one as did Hebrews.
  - This is not myth-making: the order consists of laws the mind could understand.
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Questions

- Three different cultures, three different views of the world and how it is organized. Why? What explains the difference?
  - Both the Greeks and the Hebrews were on the fringe of the dominant societies in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Does being on the edge explain why the Greeks and Hebrews took off in new directions? If something new develops, will it develop out of the mainstream? And what are the implications of that, if the answer is "yes?"
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Frame of Reference

- Beginnings 2000-1100 B.C.
  - Hellenes migrated to Greek mainland in 2000. Later developed Mycenaean civilization which ended about 1200.
  - Dark Ages 1100-750 B.C.
  - In this era Greek culture first appeared. Best seen in pottery and Homeric epics.
  - Pottery - about 1050 potters first began producing a new geometric style of pottery.
  - This pottery suggests Greeks had begun to view themselves and their world in a new light. Reality is ordered. Focus on the whole. Ideals of balance, harmony, and moderation. Confidence in the human mind.
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Example of Early Geometric Pottery

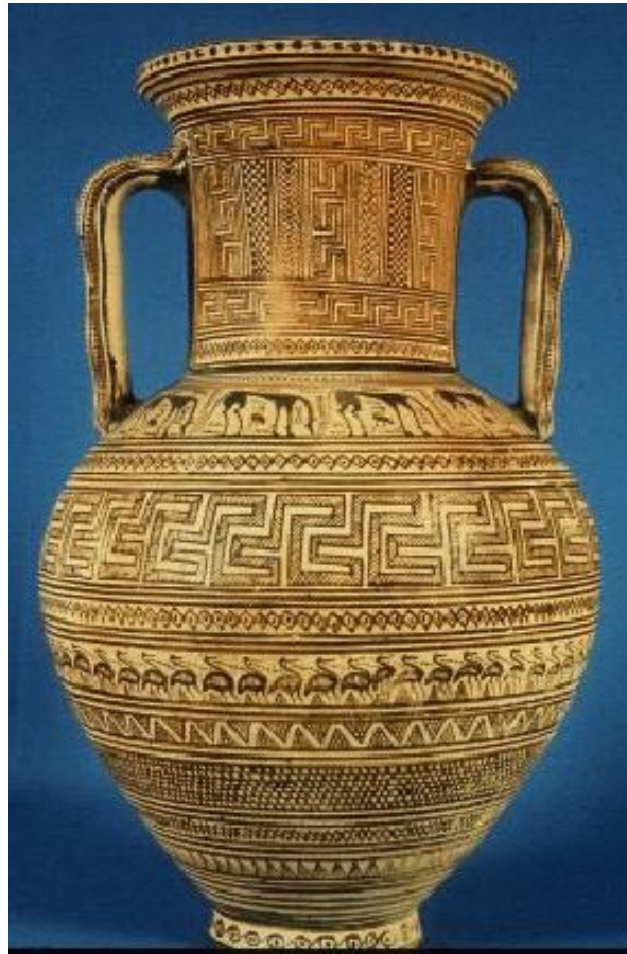


© 1996 The University of Chicago Press

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Example of Later Geometric Pottery



---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Questions

- The argument above is that pottery best shows the shift to a new attitude toward reality. Of course pottery is about all that survives from that period. But, forgetting that, do artists or craftsmen first sense the possibility of a new outlook and point the way? What are the implications of that, if true? For example, modern art shows us--what?
  - The beginnings of Greek culture lie in the ruins of the Mycenaean and the earlier Minoan cultures. Are times of destruction and the leveling of traditional institutions and patterns, fertile, creative times? We don't usually think of those times as good. Should we?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Frame of Reference (cont)

- Homer’s Iliad is another example of the new outlook.
  - Age of Revolution and Expansion 750-500 B.C.
    - An alphabet.
    - Beginnings of science and philosophy.
    - Continued artistic advances in pottery, sculpture and architecture.
    - Creation of the polis.
    - What was the polis?
    - Two examples: Sparta and Athens.
      - Sparta an armed camp. Spartiates, perioikoi, helots.
      - Athens an expanding democracy and commercial power. Solon and Cleisthenes.
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Question

- Sparta survived by making itself the most regimented ancient society we know anything about. Are there lessons in Sparta's history?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Frame of Reference (cont)

- The Classical Age 500-323
    - An era of creativity marked by almost incessant war.
    - The Persian war (490-462) The Peloponnesian War (431-402)
    - The Rise of Macedon under Philip II and Alexander the Great.
    - A profusion of geniuses crowd the fifth century
    - Historians - Herodotus and Thucydides.
    - Dramatists - Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.
    - Sculptors - Phidias and Praxiteles.
    - Architects - Ictinius.
    - Philosophers - Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.
  - What explains this era and its geniuses?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Question

- The argument is that the polis helps explain the brilliance of the Classical Age. Is there another explanation?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## The World as an Intelligible Whole: the Greek Outlook

- Classical Greek culture: fundamental beliefs, values and ideas.
    - Faith in the coherence of things and in man’s ability to know this basic order.
    - The tendency to take the whole view.
    - Feeling for balance, harmony, proportion and symmetry.
    - An emphasis on rationalism.
    - Belief in a natural explanation of the world and human life.
  - Faith in the coherence of things.
    - Earlier references to pottery and Homer. The Homeric theme of Moira or a moral order.
    - Greek philosophers take this view farther.
-

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Numbers and Order?

- Pythagoras of Samos (569-475 B.C.?)
  - The Wonder of Numbers!
    - 1. Squares of Numbers compared to their neighbors on either side
      - $10^2 = 100$
      - $9 \times 11 = 99$  (1 less)
      - $6^2 = 36$
      - $5 \times 7 = 35$
    - 2. Series producing odd numbers
      - $10 \times 10 = 100$
      - $9 \times 11 = 99$  (1)
      - $8 \times 12 = 96$  (3)
    - (And so Forth)

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Aristotle, Metaphysics

- ... "[the Pythagoreans] saw that the ... ratios of musical scales were expressible in numbers [and that] .. all things seemed to be modeled on numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of number to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number."
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Numbers and Order?

- 3. Ratios and Sounds
    - Pluck a string of any length
    - Pluck half of the same string (one octave higher)
    - Pluck half of that half (still another octave higher)
  - (And so Forth)
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Question

- React to the argument that the faith in the coherence of all things and in man's ability to grasp this coherence began as an intuition, a non-rational leap of faith that something is true. How does one *know* something? Is it a rational process or an intuitive one? What roles do intuition and reason play in thinking and understanding?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## The World as an Intelligible Whole: the Greek Outlook

- ❑ Thales (early 6th century) - Water is the single substance.
  - ❑ Heraclitus (active 500-490) - the basic law is constant change.
  - The tendency to take the whole view.
    - ❑ Homer’s *Iliad* is really about hubris. Agamemnon and Achilles both commit hubris and bring punishment.
    - ❑ Philosophers and artists also took the whole view.
    - ❑ Sculptors aim for the idealized figure. (Myron)
    - ❑ The Parthenon (447-438) illustrates this as well as the tendency toward balance, harmony, and proportion.
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Questions

- How do you respond to the idea that the Greeks took a holistic view of things?
  - What about the implications for art and architecture, not to mention poetry?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## The Parthenon Again



---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## The Parthenon Again

- An interesting look at the “Golden Mean” as a basis for the Parthenon

[Golden Mean Applied to the Parthenon](#)

---

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## The World as an Intelligible Whole: the Greek Outlook

- Confidence placed in reason
    - Again, Homer.
    - Thales and early Greek philosophers.
    - Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle show the confidence in reason best.
    - Sometime Greeks would have been better off using observation and experimentation. Hippocrates.
  - The Belief that this world contains its own explanations-naturalism.
    - Hippocrates again.
    - Living life fully and well. The Odyssey offers nothing to look forward to after death. Odysseus and Achilles’ conversation in Hades.
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Questions

- 1. Where did the Greeks get their confidence in reason? Is the belief in rational thinking just another kind of faith? What gave them the assurance they were right?
  - 2. How can one live life fully and zestfully if there is no confidence about an afterlife?
  - 3. The Greek ideal of living heroically and dying gloriously is not a dead ideal is it? Can you think of ways that ideal has survived?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Questions

- 4. Think back to the Hebrews and their ideal of the Good Life. Compare it to the Greek ideal. What are the differences? (Think of Micah 6:8: what is it that God requires but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?) Keep these different ideals in mind; we will come back to them when we get to Christianity and the medieval era.
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## The Polis as the Context for Greek Life

- Some general observations.
  - What did the Polis mean to the Greeks?
    - It is the right way to live. Aristotle’s statement.
    - Aeschylus’ Oresteia. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Iphigenia. The Furies. Athena and Zeus. The Polis resolves the impossible dilemma.
    - Learning the laws or nomoi is a fundamental part of education.
  - It is the whole community and its way of life.
    - The Polis belongs to all its citizens.
    - The Athenian example.
    - Attending the Assembly. The citizen who doesn’t take part is useless (*idiotes*).
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## The Pnyx in Athens



---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## The Polis as the Context for Greek Life

- ❑ Serving on a jury drawn from the Assembly.
  - ❑ Operation of the Assembly.
  - ❑ Fighting for the polis.
  - ❑ Taking part in the whole life of the city. Plays as civic functions. “Liturgies”.
- 
- The Greeks believed that the polis alone made it possible to achieve human potential.
    - ❑ Pericles, “Funeral Oration”
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Questions

- The Greeks believed that what man needed to perfect himself in an all-rounded way was to live in the polis. In other words, he didn't need salvation; he needed civic life. What do you think? How does one become a better human being? Truly, fully human in the fullest expression of humanity of which man is capable? Inner transformation by some religious or moral conversion? Outer transformation by living in the right kind of society?
  - If one believes that his society is grounded in the nature of things, mirrors the basic order of things, he will accept its laws as just. Right? What if he doesn't believe that his society is based on universal principles of justice? Will he obey the laws?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Questions

- Again, can one be made into a better person by living in and being subject to the laws and government and experience of social life?
  - If the U.S. Congress followed the principle that before you criticize some policy or action, you had better have a better alternative, what would happen?
  - Would you have felt restricted by the communal life of the polis? Why? Would the restrictions have been worth it?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Questions

- Pericles in his Oration, after extolling the heroes who died for the city, said "These take as your model and, judging happiness to be the fruit of freedom and freedom of valour, never decline the dangers of war." Good advice?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Man and the “Good Life”

- The Greek outlook took in the whole human condition.
    - Man is god-like but still weak and ephemeral.
    - Man hadn't the individual worth he had in Judaic thought, but he was a human being and his life was worthwhile.
    - He is free to make choices within Fate or Necessity.
    - Still, he can ponder and grasp the meaning of life.
    - He can live well by learning the rhythms which govern life.
  - Man is a whole being. If he is good, he possesses *arete*. If evil, he lacks *arete*.
  - Man is like the gods or vice versa. Yet he is mortal and suffers. Pindar (518-438 B.C.).
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe” Questions

- Greeks did not believe in the sinfulness of man. Was their view of human nature inadequate, incomplete? Why? Why not?
  - Aristotle in Nicomachean Ethics asserted that "excellence of character results from habit." Can this be true? And can this be taught and obtained by practice?
  - Is the idea of dualism (pure spirit, evil flesh) correct? Why? Why not?
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Theatre of Dionysos - Athens



---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Man and the “Good Life”

- Man’s Freedom and Fate
    - Homer again.
    - Sophocles, Oedipus the King probes deeper.
    - Oedipus, Laius, Jocasta, Polybus , Merope, Teiresias. Thebes and Corinth.
    - The theme is that even the great and wise must suffer. Yet man is not a puppet; he can accept and live with his fate.
  - The Good Life meant enjoying the good things of life.
  - The Good Life also meant living with a sense of proportion and respect for man’s limits.
    - Striving for all-rounded excellence. Balancing the virtues.
    - Failure is *Hamartia* or Hubris.
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Man and the “Good Life”

- The Political side of the Good Life
    - The “private person” is useless (their word is *idiotes*)
  - The Good Man exhibits the cardinal virtues: Courage, Temperance, Justice, and Wisdom. Courage is facing danger; Temperance is curbing one’s ambition and pride; Justice is obeying the laws, and Wisdom is trying to do the right thing at the right time.
-

---

# Classical Greece as a Basis for “Europe”

## Summary

- The Classical Greek outlook might be summed up as follows:
    - Order, not chaos, rules the world and human affairs.
    - Thus one should try to see the whole.
    - One may be confident in reason’s power to bring understanding
    - One should strive for balance, harmony, and symmetry in what one thinks, says and does.
-