

A LIFETIME READING PLAN



THE GREAT MINDS OF WESTERN CIVILISATION

Part I - The Classical Greek and Roman Worlds



CONTENTS

A Lifetime Reading Plan: An Introduction	2
A Brief History of the Classical Greek and Roman Worlds	3
The Sophists	6
The Greek Historians	7
The Great Philosophers	8
The Epicureans	9
The Stoics	10
The Sceptics	11
The Roman Eclectics	12

A Lifetime Reading Plan: Introduction

Welcome to The Mind Attic's *Lifetime Reading Plan*. This aims to take you on an intellectual journey through the works of some of the greatest thinkers of Western civilisation, starting with the classical Greek philosophers of more than 2,500 years ago.

In line with the Mind Attic's central objective, our focus will almost exclusively be upon the great minds of the *social* sciences – the political, social and economic theorists that have shaped our understanding of the *human* world. Natural scientists, such as Newton, Pythagoras and Einstein, will not therefore feature here. This is a very deliberate choice, informed by our belief that people are generally much less familiar with social science thinkers and their ideas than their natural science counterparts. This is despite the fact that many of these intellectuals have greatly influenced the course of human history by shaping our understanding of ourselves, our cultures, our politics and our societies.

We have used the word “lifetime” deliberately, because reading and critically engaging with the works in this Reading Plan will undoubtedly be a lifelong endeavour. This task should not, however, be viewed unenthusiastically as something to be completed in order to pass an examination or to receive an educational certificate. Rather, we wish to encourage the view that learning and engaging with these books should be one of life's great pleasures; an activity that gives a window into different perspectives on the world, that frames our position in human history, and cultivates a sense of wonder at human achievement. Above all, this is an endeavour which we believe can bring purpose and meaning to one's life: these are books to spend time with, to savour and enjoy, to come back to and reread at particular moments in our development, when they might take on a new significance.

In this first instalment of the *Lifetime Reading Plan* we outline some of the great works of the Greek philosophers of the 5th century BC and discuss how their ideas spread far and wide up until the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD. Future instalments will cover some of the great thinkers of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and of course our modern day era.

We hope you enjoy the journey.

The Mind Attic

Classical Greece and Rome: A Brief History & Context

Our journey through the history of Western political and social thought begins in the 5th century BC on a peninsula and archipelago of islands in South Eastern Europe – the region we broadly refer to today as Greece.

At this point in time, the Greek world looked very different. Rather than a unified nation state, the region consisted of a large number of independent city-states (known as *poleis*) each with their own armies, laws and systems of government. Some of these city-states were very small (we would barely recognise them as towns today), but others such as Athens, Sparta and Corinth were relatively large, with populations in the tens and even hundreds of thousands.

Most of the Greek city-states were ruled by a king-like figure or a small group of wealthy aristocrats. However, in Athens, political reforms had resulted in the establishment of a limited form of democracy – a term which comes from the Greek word *demokratia* meaning “rule by the people”. Under Athenian democracy, government decisions were taken by a public assembly in which all adult male citizens were eligible to participate. This assembly would meet frequently and debate and vote on proposals covering a range of topics, from taxation and public finance to matters of war and peace.

This political environment created the conditions for a Greek “Golden Age” – a flourishing of cultural and intellectual activity that was to last for two centuries. Playwrights, artists, historians and philosophers flocked to Athens from all over the Mediterranean to debate ideas and discuss the fundamental questions of life: What is “justice”? What is the “good life”? What is an “ideal city-state”?

It is against this historical backdrop that we consider our first group of thinkers, the **Sophists**, on page 5. They were professional teachers, and masters in the art of public speaking, who prepared young men in the Greek city-states for the challenges of political life. Next, on page 6, we discuss the **Greek Historians**, Herodotus and Thucydides, who gave birth to the study of history by inquiring into the facts and causes of two great conflicts that shaped the Greek world: the Greco-Persian wars (480 - 479 BC) and the Peloponnesian War (431 – 404 BC). And on page 7, we consider the **Great Philosophers** Socrates, Plato and Aristotle whose ideas laid the foundations for Western philosophical thought. It is no exaggeration to suggest that almost all contemporary philosophical debate can be traced back to the questions first raised and discussed by these three men over two millennia ago.

The End of the “Greek Golden Age” and the Rise of Alexander the Great

This extraordinary period of Greek intellectual and cultural development was not, however, destined to last. By the middle of the 5th century BC, relations between the two most powerful Greek city-states - Athens and Sparta - had become increasingly strained, leading to the Peloponnesian War, an exhausting and bloody conflict which started in 431 BC and lasted almost 28 years. The war ended in total defeat for Athens – an outcome

that was disastrous for the Greek region as a whole. For it created a power vacuum that Sparta was unable to fill, leaving the Greek region less stable and more vulnerable to outside forces.

Almost half a century later, in 359 BC, Philip II ascended the throne in Macedon – a territory to the north of the Greek peninsula. Under Philip’s leadership, the Macedonian army was transformed into a formidable military force which Philip used, together with his skills of diplomacy, to make himself the new master of Greece. After defeating the city-states of Athens and Thebes in the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC, Philip planned to use the combined might of the Greek and Macedonian armies to expand his empire into West Asia and North Africa. However, his untimely death in 336 BC left his son, Alexander, to fulfil this aim in his stead.

Alexander went on to establish one of the world’s largest empires stretching from Greece to north-western India, an achievement which has since earned him the title “Alexander the Great”. The period from the beginning of Alexander’s reign up until the Roman conquest of the eastern Mediterranean is often referred to as the “Hellenistic Age” - an era in which Greek culture and language spread across the east, as far as the borders of India.

Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Kings that followed him were absolute monarchs. Under their rule, the Greek city-states were effectively transformed into administrative centres within a larger empire; they no longer had complete autonomy over their own laws, finances or armies. With less power to shape their own political environments, Greek philosophers turned their focus away from the outer world of politics towards the inner life of men.

Three important schools of thought emerged during this era - **Epicureanism**, **Stoicism** and **Scepticism**. These philosophies - which are discussed on pages 10, 11 and 12 respectively – focused on matters such as the pursuit of happiness, how to cope with pain and suffering, and how to achieve mental tranquillity in the face of the troubling contradictions of the world. They gave comfort and hope to many at a time of great political and social upheaval.

The Decline of the Hellenistic Empire and the Rise of Rome

After Alexander’s death in 323 BC, the Hellenistic empire broke down into three competing kingdoms that continued to fight one another for territory and power. Over time, the incessant warfare weakened these kingdoms heavily, creating the opportunity for a new regional power to sweep in. This came in the shape of Rome – a small city-state in central Italy which had established itself as a Republic two centuries earlier, after its people had overthrown a tyrannical monarchy. After a series of military successes against its neighbouring rivals, Rome had become the dominant power in the Italian peninsula, and by the third century BC was challenging Carthage - the other major force in the Western Mediterranean - and the Hellenistic Kingdoms in the East.

Over the next two centuries, the Roman Republic grew from strength to strength, gradually conquering territory across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Greek communities came under Roman rule on a piecemeal basis, and as they did, the city of Rome became flooded with Greek ideas, art and literature. Philosophical ideas that had originated in Athens were soon being discussed all over the Roman world. A form of **Stoicism** (see page 10) was adopted as the main philosophical school of the Romans, but **Epicureanism** (see page 11) was also very popular amongst the upper middle classes. Some Romans, however, preferred to draw upon and combine ideas from the various Greek schools of philosophical thought – a system of philosophy we now refer to as “eclecticism”. The most famous of the **Roman Eclectics** was Marcus Tullius Cicero whom we discuss on page 13, a lawyer-politician who rose to the highest political office in Rome.

Cicero was a staunch defender of the Roman Republic. Like many other Romans, he believed that Rome’s success was built upon its mixed constitution – a form of government which combined elements of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. The Roman consuls who were elected annually were its monarchs, the Roman Senate were its aristocracy, and the people of Rome were its democracy. According to Cicero it was the delicate system of checks and balances that existed between these three parts of the Roman government that kept the powers of individuals in check, and provided the stability upon which Rome’s military successes were forged.

The Decline of the Roman Empire

Cicero’s beloved Roman Republic was not, however, built to last. The demands of defending, policing and extending a large overseas empire stretched the Roman constitution to its limits, and the Roman people ended up giving more and more power to individual military commanders. In 48 BC the military general, Julius Caesar seized control of the city and installed himself as dictator, effectively bringing the Republic to an end. After his assassination in 44 BC by a group of senators, a long period of civil war ensued, and in 27 BC Caesar’s great-nephew and appointed heir, Augustus established himself as the first emperor of Rome.

Under Augustus and his successors, Rome continued to expand its territory. But from the late 2nd century AD onwards, plagues, natural disasters, famines and invasions by “barbarian” tribes gradually brought the empire to its knees. In 285 AD the empire was divided into an eastern and western region which were governed separately. Gradually, Rome lost its place as the capital of the empire and power shifted eastwards to the new capital of Byzantium (modern day Istanbul). During the 5th century AD, continued invasions from Germanic tribes caused the Western Empire to steadily disintegrate before finally falling in 476 AD.

The fall of the Roman Empire in the west marked the end of the classical era and ushered in a new phase of Western history, where political and social thought was heavily influenced by Christianity. This new era, often referred to as “The Middle Ages”, forms the subject of the next instalment - Part II - of our Lifetime Reading Plan.

CLASSICAL GREEK AND ROMAN WORLDS

THE SOPHISTS

The Sophists - derived from the Greek word "sophia" meaning "wisdom" - were professional teachers who offered educational services to the citizens of Greek city-states for a fee. They prepared young men for the challenges and opportunities of political life by teaching them oratory (the art of public speaking) and rhetoric (the art of persuasion). These were important skills in Classical Greece, and in particular Athens, where there were large popular juries and public assemblies that needed persuading.

Although the Sophists were prolific writers, only fragments of their works have survived. We mainly know them through the writing of others, in particular Plato. He viewed them as immoral peddlers of clever, but false, arguments who were more interested in winning a debate than putting forward a reasoned or moral case. Indeed, it is largely due to Plato's criticisms that the term "sophist" continues to hold negative connotations today.

Whether you agree with the Sophists' ideas or not - and many would argue that Plato unfairly gave them a bad name - one cannot deny that they were important and influential thinkers of their time.

Key Sophist thinkers included:

Protagoras (c. 490 BC - c. 420 BC) He is sometimes referred to as the founder of the social sciences because he shifted the focus of philosophy from the natural world to the human world of politics, ethics and social relations. His famous quote "man is the measure of all things" reflects his argument that human subjectivity determines the way we understand our world - a belief that is often interpreted as an early form of relativism. He was a leading character in one of Plato's most enjoyable dialogues, entitled *Protagoras*, and his ideas on the nature of knowledge are also discussed in Plato's *Theaetetus*.

Thrasymachus (c. 459 - c. 400 BC) He was a diplomat and famous orator who provided one of the first fundamental critiques of moral values and justice by arguing that justice is simply the will of the strongest man or party within a state. This is captured by his famous quote "justice is the interest of the stronger". Thrasymachus's notion of justice and power is set out in Book I of Plato's *Republic*, and is the starting point for Plato's search for a different kind of political order.

Gorgias (c.483 - c. 375 BC) He was a famous orator and master of rhetoric. In his work *Encomium of Helen* he attempted to argue against the popular opinion that Helen of Troy was responsible for the Trojan War. His aim was to take the weaker argument and make it the stronger one. He was also a leading character in Plato's dialogue, *Gorgias*, which discusses the power of rhetoric and the nature of those that aspire to public office.

Other important Sophists included: Hippias, Antiphon, Prodicus and Callicles, all of whom appear in Plato's dialogues.

CLASSICAL GREEK AND ROMAN WORLDS

THE GREEK HISTORIANS

*For a long time, the Greeks' interest in the past was largely concerned with mythical stories - tales of events involving supernatural beings or Gods - that were passed down from generation to generation in oral form. **The Iliad and The Odyssey**, written around the 8th century BC by the Greek poet Homer, are the first and most famous written examples of this oral tradition. They recount the events surrounding the Trojan war, and are replete with tales of war heroes and the activities of the Olympian Gods.*

While the Homeric poems may have contained some kernels of truth, they did not represent a factual account of the past. It was not until the 5th century BC that a more systematic form of historical inquiry began to take shape. This was largely due to the work of two Greek thinkers - Herodotus and Thucydides - who set out to critically investigate two major events that shaped the Greek world: the Greco-Persian wars (480 - 479 BC) and the Peloponnesian War (431 - 404 BC). By making a serious attempt to inquire into the facts and causes of these two great conflicts, Herodotus and Thucydides gave birth to the study of history as we know it today.

Herodotus (c. 484 – c. 425 BC) is often considered “the Father of History” for writing the first systematic study of the past. His magnum opus, *The Histories*, gives an historical account of the Greco-Persian Wars (480 - 479 BC) in which a coalition of Greek city-states achieved victory against the great military power at the time: the Persian Empire. As the war had taken place before Herodotus' lifetime, he tried to reconstruct events by drawing on the oral reports of survivors and younger men who could recall the stories of their elders. On this, he said “**my duty is to report the things reported...it is not to believe them all alike**”. While his methods fell short of modern historians, Herodotus' determination to interrogate the facts and causes of the war – and his shift in focus away from the Gods towards the human world of politics - marked the beginnings of a new form of critical investigation into the past.

Thucydides (c. 460 – c. 400 BC) followed in Herodotus' footsteps with his analysis of the causes and conduct of *The Peloponnesian War (431 – 404 BC)* – a great conflict between the leading Greek city-states, Athens and Sparta, which took place during his lifetime. Like Herodotus, Thucydides' objective was not only to give a reliable account of the war, but also to explain *why* it happened and to pinpoint the factors that led to the Athenian empire's eventual defeat. He did so with less romance and more precision than Herodotus, focusing narrowly on the facts and providing rational, objective explanations of events. Moreover, the Gods were excluded entirely from his analysis; he chose instead to focus his attention on the psychologies, motives and behaviours of the people who led Athens, Sparta and their allies. His search for the truth, and his rational, matter-of-fact style greatly influenced historical writers in the centuries that followed, and his work continues to inspire political thinkers today.

CLASSICAL GREEK AND ROMAN WORLDS

THE GREAT PHILOSOPHERS

The introduction of a democratic form of government in Athens contributed to a flourishing of intellectual and artistic activity. Playwrights, artists, historians and philosophers flocked to the city-state from all over the Mediterranean to debate ideas and discuss the important questions of life.

One of the greatest of these philosophers was the Athenian, Socrates, whose style of philosophical questioning gained him a large following of admirers. His pupil, Plato, later set up an Academy to teach Socrates' ideas to the young men of Athens. One of Plato's students was the budding philosopher, Aristotle, who spent 20 years at the Academy before setting up his own school, the Lyceum. In 343 BC Aristotle was famously summoned to the court of Philip II of Macedon who asked him to tutor his son, Alexander – the boy who was eventually to become Alexander the Great.

Together, these three thinkers – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle – are now considered some of the most influential philosophers of all time. Between them, they laid the foundations for Western philosophical thought, and their ideas continue to be studied in classrooms across the world today.

Socrates (c. 469—399 BC) is often credited as the founder of Western philosophy. He spent his life interrogating the opinions and beliefs of people in the public squares of Athens. He is best known for inventing “the Socratic method” – a form of critical questioning which he used to expose people’s underlying beliefs and the limits of their knowledge. Socrates did not produce any written material during his lifetime, so his philosophical thought is only known through the writing of others, most notably through Plato’s *Dialogues*. He was sentenced to death in 399 BC after being found guilty of impiety and “corrupting the youth” of Athens.

Plato (c. 427— c.347 BC) was a student of Socrates and a hugely influential philosopher in his own right. He wrote the *Dialogues* – discussions of moral and philosophical problems between two or more people - in which Socrates appears as the principal character alongside other philosophers of the time (including many of the Sophists discussed on p.6). His most famous work, *The Republic* focuses on the concept of justice, and the order and character of an ideal form of city-state. It brings together his views on ethics, politics, morality, epistemology and ontology into one overarching philosophy.

Aristotle (c.384 BC - 322 BC) was a student of Plato and one of his greatest critics. In his work, *Politics*, he examined the different political regimes existing across Greece at the time. This practical, empirical approach to the study of politics contrasted directly with his mentor Plato, who developed his ideal form of city-state through abstract reasoning alone. For Aristotle, the best form of government was one that provided individuals with the opportunity to pursue a “good life”. In another of his important works, *Nicomachean Ethics*, he set out his ideas on what a “good life” entailed, namely the pursuit of a virtuous character.

CLASSICAL GREEK AND ROMAN WORLDS

THE EPICUREANS

Epicureanism was one of the first schools of philosophy to emerge during the Hellenistic era – the period from the beginning of the reign of Alexander the Great in 336 BC to the Roman conquest of the eastern Mediterranean, conventionally dated from 31 BC.

During this Hellenistic age, the Greek city-states were transformed into administrative centres within a larger empire; they no longer had complete autonomy over their own laws, finances and armies. As a result, Greek philosophers shifted their focus away from the outer world of politics, towards the inner life of men.

The founder of Epicureanism was the Athenian citizen, Epicurus (341 BC – 270BC) - a philosopher whose primary concern was with the pursuit of happiness. Epicurus regarded the fear of death and punishment in the afterlife as the principal cause of anxiety amongst men and the source of their irrational desires. By countering this fear, he believed he could free people to pursue happiness in this life.

Epicurus' teachings spread across the Hellenistic and later, Roman worlds. His philosophical thought remained popular until the decline of the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD.

Epicurus (c.341 – 270 BC) was an Athenian citizen and major philosopher of the Hellenistic period. He taught that there was no afterlife; that the human body and soul were made up of atoms and they simply perished after death. The aim of his philosophy was to find happiness in *this* life, something which he thought could be achieved through the pursuit of moderate pleasures and by minimising physical pain and mental anxiety. Epicurus set up a school in Athens to promote his philosophy, and his teachings eventually spread across the Hellenistic, and later Roman, worlds. He was a prolific writer but almost none of his own work has survived. We are able to access his philosophical thoughts through the work of Diogenes Laertius who wrote *The Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, and the work of the Roman thinker Lucretius (see below).

Lucretius (c. 99 – 55 BC) was an Epicurean thinker during the late stages of the Roman Republic. He was alive at a time when Epicureanism was flourishing in Italy. His major work, *On the Nature of Things*, is largely an exposition of Epicurus's original philosophical thought written in the form of a long poem. It is primarily a work of physics, detailing Epicurean thinking on the constitution of the universe and their theory of atoms. However, it also discusses Epicurean ideas regarding the pursuit of happiness, and touches upon the themes of pain and pleasure and how to counter the fear of death:

*“.....we may be certain that in death
There is nothing to fear, that he who does not exist
Cannot feel pain, that it makes no difference
Whether or not a man has been born before,
When death the immortal has taken his mortal life.”*

CLASSICAL GREEK AND ROMAN WORLDS

THE STOICS

Stoicism was one of the most influential philosophies of the Hellenistic Age. It was originally founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium (344 – 262 BCE), a Cypriot who chose to devote his life to philosophy after being inspired by the great philosopher, Socrates. The term “stoicism” comes from the Greek word “stoa poikilê” which refers to the “painted porch” in the agora - a public meeting place in Athens where Zeno’s lectures were held.

To the stoics, philosophy was not just a theoretical discipline; it was a way of life. They believed that all worldly events were predetermined and therefore beyond man’s control. To achieve happiness, individuals had to learn to live in harmony with this predestined nature, and develop an ability to react to events in the right way.

After the Hellenistic empire collapsed, and the Greek city-states came under Roman rule, Greek ideas flooded the Roman world. Stoicism was by far the most popular of the Greek philosophies and was adopted as the main philosophical school of the Romans. Although eventually eclipsed by the rise of Christianity, the term “stoic” has survived today to refer to someone who is able to endure pain or suffering without showing their emotions.

None of the works of **Zeno** or other Greek stoic philosophers, such as **Cleanthes** and **Chrysippus**, have survived intact. The only complete works available to us today are by stoic thinkers of Imperial Roman times:

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (circa 4 BC – AD 65) was born in Cordoba (the leading town in Roman Spain) and educated in Rome. In 48 AD he became the tutor to the future Roman Emperor, Nero and later, was one of his principal advisers. His most famous and widely read works are his *Letters to Lucilius* which he wrote near the end of his life. They contain much practical wisdom – on death, on mercy, on happiness, and on coping with life’s setbacks - and illustrate many of the ideals of stoicism.

Epictetus (circa 50 – 135 AD) was a Greek slave who lived a portion of his life in Rome, serving the court of the emperor, Nero. After receiving his freedom, he became a respected teacher of stoic ethics, establishing his own school at Nicopolis in Northwest Greece. His brand of stoicism is detailed in his *Discourses* - an account of his teachings written by one of his pupils. An abridged version, the *Enchiridion*, is also available and provides a useful introduction into stoic thought.

Marcus Aurelius (121 – 180 AD) was a stoic philosopher and Emperor of Rome from 161 AD until his death in 180 AD. During his reign, the empire was troubled by famines, plagues, natural disasters, rebellions and invasions by Germanic tribes. His most famous work, *The Meditations*, was written during his last military campaign on the frozen banks of the Danube. It is a series of spiritual self-reflections that he wrote without any expectation of publication, and therefore offers a unique insight into the mind of a stoic philosopher.

CLASSICAL GREEK AND ROMAN WORLDS

THE SCEPTICS

Scepticism is an important philosophical tradition that emerged in Greece during the 4th century BC, and later spread throughout the Hellenistic world. It was founded by Pyrrho of Elis (c.360 – 270 BC), a Greek philosopher who reportedly accompanied Alexander the Great on his travels through the Persian Empire and India. It was during the course of this military expedition that Pyrrho was said to have encountered some “naked wise men” (possibly early Buddhists) whose teachings inspired him to found a new philosophy.

The goal of Pyrrho's school of thought was to achieve a state of tranquillity by suspending judgement over all matters. By neither accepting or rejecting any proposition, nor holding onto any firm opinions on any subject, Pyrrho believed that he could escape the troubling contradictions of the world and avoid mental anxiety.

In the centuries after Pyrrho's death, various schools of scepticism emerged which questioned the possibility of attaining knowledge. To this day, scepticism plays an important role in Western philosophy by forcing us to re-examine our commonly held assumptions and beliefs about what is true.

Pyrrho wrote nothing down and so most of what we know about him today comes from fragments of the writings of one his followers, **Timon (circa 320 – 235 BC)**. However, by far the best and most comprehensive account of Pyrrhonian scepticism was written by a philosopher who lived more than 400 years after Pyrrho's death:

Sextus Empiricus (circa 2nd century AD) was a medical doctor and philosopher who likely lived in Rome, Athens or Alexandria (we do not know exactly where). He was called “Empiricus” because there were three main schools of medicine at the time - the Rationalists, the Empiricists and the Methodists - and he belonged to the Empirical school. He followed the sceptic tradition set by Pyrrho, and throughout his life entered into intellectual combat with anyone who confidently claimed to possess knowledge about a given subject.

While Sextus Empiricus' medical writings did not survive, his philosophical work, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* has become an important source of sceptic philosophy. It provides a complete description of Pyrrhonian scepticism – its origins, its aims, its underlying motivations – and details at length the modes of argumentation that a sceptic can deploy.

Other important ancient sceptics include Arcesilaus, Carneades and Aenesidemus. Arcesilaus and Carneades wrote nothing, preferring instead to engage in verbal argument, inspired by the philosopher Socrates. Aenesidemus' written work did not survive, although his thoughts have been briefly summarised by Photius – a learned man who lived in medieval times who wrote many extracts and abridgements of classical works that are lost to us today.

CLASSICAL GREEK AND ROMAN WORLDS

THE ROMAN ECLECTICS

Rather than staying rigidly faithful to a single philosophical tradition, some Romans preferred to draw upon and combine ideas from the various schools of philosophical thought to address particular practical problems and situations. In doing so, they helped create a new system of philosophy known as "eclecticism", a term which comes from the Greek word "eklektos", meaning "to pick out or select".

The most famous Roman eclectic was Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 - 43 BC) - a lawyer and statesman who was alive during the late stages of the Roman Republic. Cicero was educated in Rome, Athens and Rhodes, and hence was well-versed in the philosophical ideas of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, as well as the doctrines of Scepticism, Stoicism and Epicureanism. He drew upon ideas from each of these schools of thought when outlining his own brand of political philosophy and ethics.

Eclecticism is common in many fields of study today - particularly in the social sciences - with academics using a variety of theoretical approaches to gain different perspectives on a particular problem or phenomena.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC- 43 BC) was a lawyer-politician-philosopher who rose to the position of consul - the highest elected political office of the Roman Republic - in 63 BC. He was a true eclectic; his thought was drawn from a number of different philosophical systems including Epicureanism, Stoicism, Scepticism and the ideas of the great philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. His strongest influence, however, was stoic thought, particularly later in his life, after he had witnessed the downfall of the Roman Republic - a system which he had staunchly defended throughout his political career.

Much of what we know today about the politics and society of the Roman Republic is drawn from Cicero's writings. His most famous philosophical work, *On Duties*, used various concepts and theories from Greek philosophy to articulate the political and ethical values - as he saw them - of the Roman Republic. And his political works, *On the Republic* and *On the Laws*, provide us with a detailed examination of the Roman "mixed constitution" - a combination of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy - which Cicero believed was the key to Rome's success.

In 48 BC Cicero ended up submitting to the military general Julius Caesar who installed himself as dictator, an act which effectively brought the Republic to an end. After Caesar's assassination in 44 BC, rumours circulated that Cicero had been involved in the plot to have him murdered, and in 43 BC he was executed by Roman soldiers after attempting to flee from Italy.

Other notable Roman eclectics include Marcus Terentius Varro (116 - 27 BC) and Lucius Annaeus Seneca (circa 4 BC - AD 65), although the latter was more strongly influenced by stoic thought (see p. 10).

Important Information

© 2020 The Mind Attic. All rights reserved.

This document contains proprietary information of The Mind Attic and is intended for the exclusive use of the parties to whom it was provided by The Mind Attic. Its content may not be modified, sold or otherwise provided, in whole or in part, to any other person or entity, without The Mind Attic's prior written permission.

Information contained herein may have been obtained from a range of third-party sources. While the information is believed to be reliable, The Mind Attic has not sought to verify it independently. As such, The Mind Attic makes no representations or warranties as to the accuracy of the information presented and takes no responsibility or liability (including for indirect, consequential, or incidental damages) for any error, omission or inaccuracy in the data supplied by any third party.



Website: www.mindattic.org

Email: aedwards@mindattic.org