

An exposition of the characteristics of classical Greek philosophy

Dr. S. B. M. Marume¹, R.R. Jubenkanda², C.W. Namusi³, N. C. Madziyire⁴

¹BA, Hons BA, MA, MAdmin, MSoc Sc, PhD

²BSc, MSc. Econ, MSc, DPhil (Candidate)

³BAdmin (Hons), MPA, DPhil (Candidate)

⁴BE, MEd, DPhil (Candidate)

Abstract : Philosophy as a discipline has an historical perspective. In the case of the Greek philosophy the period commences with Thales of the seventh century B.C. and ends with Aristotle in the fourth century B.C. This period exhibits certain definite characteristics which were based on the following four presuppositions which were based on the following four presuppositions; namely, a particular attitude towards reality; the cosmos as a totality; the nature of life; and the idea of the constant. These constitute the subject of this article.

Keywords: presuppositions, cosmos, reality, totality and constant.

I. Introduction

The classical Greek philosophy exhibits certain definite characteristics that are based on four presuppositions which form the subject this article.

Purpose of the article

The express purpose of this article is to give a concise exposition of the four identifiable characteristics of classical Greek philosophy.

Concise exposition of the characteristics of classical Greek philosophy

A concise exposition of the characteristics of the classical Greek philosophy demonstrates that the period of classical Greek philosophy commences with Thales (seventh century B.C) and ends with Aristotle (fourth century B.C). This period exhibits certain characteristics which form the subject of this discussion

What then are the characteristics of the philosophy of the classical period, and on what presuppositions is that philosophy based?

Answers

Four presuppositions form the characteristics of classical Greek philosophy.

A particular attitude towards reality

The aim is not to change the world but to know reality. The ancient Greeks highly esteemed an inquiring mind. Knowledge is man's reflection of nature and knowledge is an end for its own sake. Augustine (354-430AD) says empiricism is a method that seeks knowledge through. Empiricism attempts to discover interrelatedness between sensory impressions. For the empiricist ideas begin with sensory experience. By rational induction they are transformed into empirical knowledge. Human reason is capable of revealing the truth.

The Cosmos is conceived as a totality

- (a) The classical Greek philosopher poses questions concerning phenomena as a totality and not questions concerning separate phenomena. His problems relate to the whole not to particular parts of it.
- (b) The whole or total reality or totality is conceived as a Cosmos that is an orderly whole. There is no chaos. The Cosmos is a non chaotic, orderly total reality.
- (c) The Cosmos is bounded in space and time.
- (d) Reality reflects an organizing spirit.

The nature of life

The nature of life is not strife and chaos, but *tranquility and equilibrium*. The very canon of Greek life and thought is *harmony*.

The idea of the constant

The Greeks valued the constant, the independent, the static, the invariable, the unchanging, and they took a conceptual approach to understanding it. Because of the Greek conceptual and methodological approach, logic and geometry, which are formal or conceptual sciences par excellence, were developed and flourished in the Greek thought. The Greek love of the constant is well mirrored in Plato's conception of "Ideas" as external and invariable.

How and what then philosophy was considered to be?

Amongst the ancient Greek philosophers, Aristotle (384-322 B.C) regarded philosophy as *the theoretical study of ultimate reality*: the study of the most comprehensive and most fundamental principles of all existing things.

In contrast to Aristotle, the Stoics regarded philosophy as a practical discipline: the main task of the philosopher was to teach us how to organize our lives in an intelligibly meaningful way.

In the modern period, by philosophy we mean a rational attempt by man to pose, and determine the validity of, both problems and solutions pertaining to a world-view and a view of life.

An analysis of this definition of philosophy includes these concepts:

- a. a rational attempt;
- b. pose and determine validity;
- c. problems and solutions;
- d. world – view; and
- e. view of life

II. Conclusion

In conclusion the classical Greeks valued the constant, the independent, the static, the invariable, the unchanging, and they took a conceptual approach to understanding it because of the Greek conceptual methodological approach, logic and geometry, which are formal or conceptual sciences par excellence, were developed and flourished in the Greek thought. The Greek love of the constant is well mirrored in Plato's conception of "Ideas" as eternal [eternity] and invariable [invariability].

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Profiles of contributors and photographs



Samson Brown Muchineripi Marume: a former senior civil servant for over 37 years in various capacities and 10 years as deputy permanent secretary; ten years as a large commercial farmer; well travelled **domestically** within Zimbabwe; **regionally** [SADC countries: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritius, Swaziland, South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and DRC]; and **Africa** [Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Libya, and Uganda]; and **internationally** [Washington, New York and California in USA; Dublin and Cork in Ireland; England in United Kingdom; Netherlands, Spain (Nice), France, Geneva in Switzerland, former Yugoslavia-Belgrade; Rome and Turin in Italy; Cyprus – Nicosia; Athens – Greece; Beijing and Great Walls of China; Singapore; Hong Kong;

Tokyo, Kyoto, Yokohama, Osaka, in Japan]; ten years as management consultant and part – time lecturer for BA/BSc and MA/MBA levels with Christ College- affiliate of Great Zimbabwe University, and PhD/DPhil research thesis supervisor, internal and external examiner with Christ University, Bangalore, India, and Zimbabwe Open University; currently senior lecturer and acting chairperson of Department of Public Administration in Faculty of Commerce and Law of Zimbabwe Open University; a negotiator; a prolific writer as he has published five books, twenty five modules in public administration and political science for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and thirty seven journal articles in international journals [IOSR, SICA, IJESR, MRESR, IJSER, IJBMI, IJHSS and Quest Journals] on constitutional and administrative law, public administration, political science, philosophy, Africa in international politics, local government and administration, sociology and community development; vastly experienced public administrator; and a distinguished scholar with specialist qualifications from University of South Africa, and California University for Advanced Studies, State of California, United States of America: **BA** with majors in public administration and political science and subsidiaries in sociology, constitutional law and English; postgraduate special **Hons BA** [Public Administration], **MA** [Public Administration]; **MAdmin** magna cum laude in transport economics - as major, and minors in public management and communications; **MSoc Sc** cum laude in international politics as a major and minors in comparative government and law, war and strategic studies, sociology, and social science research methodologies; **PhD** summa cum laude in Public Administration .



Roy Robson Jubenkanda: 2008 currently pursuing DPhil studies with ZOU; dean of Commerce and Law for seven years; writer of a book on strategic leadership, several modules on strategic management, corporate governance, strategic human resources, intermediate macro economics, labour economics, business management and entrepreneurship, project management and credit risk management; and over thirty articles with international journals on various subject areas; 2000, MSc in Strategic Management – University of Derby, U. K; MSc. Econ. In international Economics, Banking and Finance- University of Wales, Cardiff College of Business Studies, U.K.; 1983, BSc (Hons) Degree in Economics – University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe; 1976 Business Studies Diploma – Solusi University, Zimbabwe; 2005, Certificate in Distance Education Practitioner (UNISA); 2011, Certificate in Higher Education Management in Southern Africa (University of the Witwatersrand) Johannesburg, South Africa.



Cornelius Wonder Namusi: current studies: DPhil (candidate) in Public Administration; a writer of over thirty articles in international journals; Master of Public Administration (UZ); Bachelor of Administration Honours (UZ); 2011, Certificate: Module Writing; 2011, Certificate: Managing the training programme – ESAMI, Tanzania; 1990, Certificate advanced work study (Canada); 1986, Certificate: Organisation and methods O & M), Institute of Development Administration IDM – Botswana); 1983, Certificate in Labour Administration, African Regional Labour Administration Centre (ARLAC) (Nairobi); 1964, Primary Teachers Higher Certificate (PHT) Waddilove Teacher Training Institution, Marondera, Zimbabwe, Chairperson of department of management and Business Studies in the Faculty of Commerce and Law of Zimbabwe Open University



N. C. Madziyire: current studies; DPhil (Candidate); a writer of over twenty articles in various disciplines with international journals; Master of Education (Educational Administration) (UZ); Bachelor of Education (Curriculum studies and Teacher Education) (UZ); Diploma in Teacher Education (Dip TE) (UZ); Primary Teachers' Higher Certificate (St Augustine's); Senior lecturer in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Zimbabwe Open University; Programme leader for The Bachelor of Education in Youth Development studies; I am also responsible for developing distance materials for distance learners.