

SUNY Purchase
History of Philosophy I: Philosophy in the Polis
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Final Examination Options II & III
20 December 1990

These pages were distributed in class on 13 December 1990. They constitute possible—and somewhat more challenging—alternatives to the standard final examination (**option I**, the “default option”—one half passage identifications with epitomizations and one half short essays). Please read it over before the next class, on December 17th, when you will have the opportunity to declare final examination **options I, II, or III** (those who do not declare will be presumed to wish **option I**).

Option II

Prepare to write a story about how philosophers in the world of the city [*polis*] formed the basic structure(s) of science in the West (and now the world). Focus your story on the topic of “**archeology**,” i.e., the search for (a.) the primary “stuff” [*arche*] of which all things are composed and (b.) the “principles” [*archai*] by which secondary things may be said to come out of the primary one or ones. Assigning a role to as many of the philosophers studied as you can, outline the development of this search and show how it leads to the three basic alternatives in Physics: (1) **Formalism** [the Pythagoreans and Plato], (2) **Atomism** [Leucippus and Democritus], and (3) **Individualism** [Aristotle]. [Incidentally, their modern counterparts are the physics of (1) Galileo, (2) Newton, and (3) Kepler-Hegel-Einstein; obviously you cannot discuss modern physics in your essay.]

The following sketch, or plot-outline (based on F.E. Peters’ entry, “**arche**: beginning, starting point, principle, ultimate underlying substance ...,” in his *Greek Philosophical Terms*, New York: NYU Press, 1967, pp. 23–4), may be helpful as you review materials in preparation for writing *your* story. But base your story on the texts studied and our discussion of them in class; do not merely paraphrase this sketch in your essay. Use it as a point of departure for rethinking the issues and formulating them in your own words. You will probably find it helpful to read over the sketch at several sittings. You may ask questions about it in either of our remaining class sessions. Whatever you do, please make sure that you develop a good basic understanding of what the story is about before you elect option **I, II, or III** on December 17th. The story itself can be told in many ways; there is no “correct” way. But some versions of the story will make more sense than others.

The pre-Socratic search for an *arche* in the sense of a material cause is described by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, Bk. I, 983–985b, and the word *arche* may have first been used in this technical sense by Anaximander. The first candidates for the basic ingredient of things were sensible “stuffs” like water or moisture (Thales; see *Meta.*, 983b), air (Anaximenes), and fire (Heraclitus) but with Anaximander’s suggestion that the *arche* was something indeterminate [*apeiron*] an immense step away from the purely sensory had been taken. It opened the possibility that the *arche* was something more basic than what could be perceived by the senses, even though the *apeiron* was, at this stage, unmistakably material. Thus Anaximander opened the line of inquiry that led to the single spherical One of Parmenides [*on, hen*] with its related distinction between true knowledge [*episteme*] and opinion [*doxa*], and to the plural

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geometrical, mathematical, or formal *archai* of the Pythagoreans and Plato [*monas, arithmos, eidos*] and the atoms [*atoma*] of Leucippus and Democritus.

What might be termed the sensualist tradition continued to seek the ultimate irreducible entities in sensibly perceived bodies until Empedocles standardized them at four, the “elements” [*stoicheia*] earth, air, fire, and water, but there is scarcely anyone except Empedocles himself who accepts these as true *archai*; rather they are (as in Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Aristotle) stages between the still more remote *archai* and the higher complexities of composite bodies [*syntheta*].

With this emphasis upon the structure and stages of **change** in physical things, the search for *archai* takes a new tack. Both Parmenides and Empedocles had been emphatic in their denial of change, the former by attributing it to an illusion of the senses, the latter by maintaining the eternity of the *stoicheia*. But the fact of change was so patent that some principled account of its structure became the new object of search; Anaxagoras and the Atomists (esp. Democritus), each in his own way, reassert *genesis* and so, too, the possibility that the Empedoclean *stoicheia* change into each other.

A new analysis of *genesis*, begun by Plato and developed by Aristotle, rejects the old notions of change as mixture or conglomeration or association, and concentrates instead—the lead had been given by Anaxagoras [see fragments 4 & 12]—on three factors: (1.) the notion of a “power” or “potentiality” [*dynamis*] which has (2.) a correlative *dynamis* as its “contrary,” and (3.) the thing undergoing a transition from the one contrary to the other. This is well within the sensualist tradition since these “powers” can be distinguished sensibly; Aristotle reduces the elementary contraries to two pairs: “hot/cold” and “wet/dry,” qualities perceptible to the sense shared by all animals: touch; via these contraries even the “elements”—earth, water, air, and fire—are generated. But there is a nod as well in the direction of the *apeiron* with the isolation of the third (supplementing the two, always binary, e.g., “hot/cold,” contraries) *arche* of change, the not-yet-determined (like Anaximander’s *apeiron*) substratum [*hypokeimenon*] which undergoes the change or, more specifically, motion [*kinesis*], from one contrary to its other. Aristotle’s physical theory must accordingly involve three principles.

Hence Aristotle’s three-fold account of change as **I. Generation**, **II. Corruption**, and **III. Motion** and his further subdivision of motion: **A. Qualitative Motion**, sometimes translated “alteration,” e.g., between the contraries wet and dry or between the contraries green and red; **B. Quantitative Motion**, sometimes “growth” or “decay,” e.g., between the contraries smaller, e.g., sapling, and larger, e.g., mature oak; and **C. Locomotion** or movement of place, e.g., between the contraries here and there, between Athens and Sparta.

When an individual is considered not merely as a sensible moving thing but as a real individual (being *qua* being, i.e., as substance [*ousia*]), then the contraries in question are “potentiality/actuality” (*Meta.* Bk. IX) and *this* process, activity [*energeia*] is not merely informed by a substratum’s potentiality to move toward a qualitative, quantitative or local contrary but a process informed by a substratum’s realization of its potential (contrary¹) to be an individual, i.e., actual (contrary²).

Here (in “first philosophy” or “metaphysics”) the first contrary, potentiality, is a matter of degree (in “the great chain of being”). In each case, potentiality is potentiality for an actualization, and

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every individual is real because it achieves a degree of actuality [*energeia*] in its incessant process from contrary¹ (potentiality) to contrary² (actuality). Each individual substance achieves actuality as best it can, according to its nature. But all individuals *are* because they all “point to one” [*pros hen*] supreme principle [*arche*] of what they all are, if incompletely: actuality. That complete actuality (described in *Meta.* XII) Aristotle calls the “unmoved mover” (which moves all individuals because they each have the “erotic” desire to be completely actual individuals, i.e., divine) or “god.”

This, then, is the eventual solution (among the “**Individualists**,” sc., Aristotle; the **Atomist** and **Formalist** solutions continue to flourish, especially in our time) of the problem of the *archai* of physical bodies: (a.) opposed powers or contraries, some of which can act [*poiein*] while others can be acted upon [*paschein*], (b.) a material substratum in which change occurs, and, eventually, (c.) an initiator of change who moves because it is the very nature of all physical individuals (not merely men) to desire complete actualization (the god of dispassionate philosophy; somewhat ironically, perhaps, it is also the vision of being which inspired that most passionate poet, Dante, to shape a phrase that has now become a cliché: “love makes the world go round”). This is a plot for the story of Philosophy in the World of the Polis.

You may organize your essay any way you like. Just be sure that you tell a version of the story that makes sense; and try to give most of the major players a role in your story. Talk about the story, including your version of it, with other members of the class if you can (philosophy thrives on discussion). You may use whatever source materials you like in preparing for the essay exam (my guess is that you will find your assigned texts most useful), but the in-class essay will be written without any reference to any books, notes, or the like.

If you chose this option, your essay on this topic will constitute your entire final examination. It will take place from 10:30–12:00 AM on 20 December 1990.

Option III

This option will consist in an essay using Snell’s *The Discovery of the Mind* as a way to integrate a final in-class essay drawing upon your understanding of all the readings and lectures for the course. Use as much of Snell as you can, but focus upon chapter 8, “The Call to Virtue: A Brief Chapter from Greek Ethics.” Consider Snell’s outline of the stages of ethical development in the Polis against the background of the larger transition from the “Poetical Polis” through Homer’s *Odyssey* and the rise of literacy to the “Philosophical Polis.” You may wish to include discussion of the formation of the “vortex” (or the “whirlwind”) model of the cosmos among the pre-Socratic thinkers, together with Aristophanes’ reaction in *The Clouds*, the phenomenon of Socrates as “the inventor of morality,” the absence of any concept of “will” among the politans—what do “moderns” understand by “will” and how can we understand that our word “will” will not translate back into politan Greek?—, and the preparation (esp. in 4th century Athens) for the subsequent “Discovery of *Humanitas*” (Snell, pp. 246–263) that is now enshrined in such institutions as the Humanities Division at SUNY Purchase.

The same terms apply for the selection of this option as for Option II.