

Philosophy vs. Existential Thinking
Greek (Platonic) Philosophy
(as understood by Existential Thinkers)

Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge) What is knowledge?

Theory is highest kind of knowledge. Disinterested attitude, reflection, self-criticism, and reason enables one to discover objective, universal, timeless truths. This is still the goal of natural science and every discipline that claims to be scientific.

Non-Greeks are called barbarians because they don't speak Greek, but they can be taught Greek and then they too can become philosophers.

There is no positive significance in perception, skilled know-how, intuition, emotion, body, folk wisdom, and tradition. They just get in the way.

Plato says we leave them behind when we leave the cave and see the unchanging forms.

Ethics What should I do?

Act on principles or rules for right action that are the same for any rational being.

Plato tells us what all human beings really need and how to act so as to fulfill that need.

To act rightly you must get beyond personal preferences, prejudices, and desires. Don't make an exception of yourself.

A person who acts morally can justify his or her action and would be understood by anyone equally rational.

Since all moral people would respond the same way to the same situation, all moral perfect people would act the same way. People would be individuated by how far they fall short of moral perfection.

Metaphysics What is real?

If theory is highest form of truth, then the objects of theory are the most real. The objects of theory are timeless, abstract, structures.

The truths of science and math have always been true and always will be. The universe is eternal and simply repeats itself in cycles.

Nothing is radically new. Even history always follows the same general pattern. People as they grow realize the potential in them, like a tree growing from a seed. The implicit becomes explicit.

If you die to the body, which only gets in the way of being rational, you get out of time, change, perspective, conflict, and death. As your rational soul merges with the rational structure of reality, you become eternal.

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The Judeo-Christian Tradition

Of course, the Hebrews didn't have the Greek philosophical categories, but if they had had them, here is how they would look.

Epistemology

For the Hebrew's, truth meant being true to God's covenant.

That truth was not universal but was revealed at a particular time and place to a particular people, and was preserved in a tradition.

To live in the truth required not detachment, but total commitment.

Non-Hebrews are called idol-worshippers, and one doesn't try to convert them or teach them Hebrew. One either ignores them or kills them.

Morality

The ultimate authority is God, not reason. In the Euthyphro, Socrates asks Euthyphro: "Do the gods approve of an action because it is pious (i.e. good), or is it pious because the gods approve of it."

As a good Greek, Euthyphro says the former, since the gods are rational and so are bound to agree with whatever reason shows to be good.

But, as the Abraham story as interpreted by Kierkegaard shows, the Judeo-Christian tradition is committed to the latter. An action is good because God commands it. And what God commands can be different for each individual.

Metaphysics

Time and history is where everything significant happens.

The universe is created ex nihilo at a certain time. The covenant, the Ten Commandments, and the Incarnation all are radically new developments that take place in history. According to Kierkegaard even the eternal takes place in time.

Radical human transformation is possible. People are reborn, they become new beings. Also after the Incarnation people live in a new world.

To claim that anything radically new could be created was a scandal to Greek reason.