



Some Greek words

Used as philosophical terms

Prepared and modified from <https://phil201.umwblogs.org/greek-terms/>

Jargon or common terms?

- There was no real technical terminology for philosophy around the Presocratics
- So they used ordinary words, and words from literature
 - Especially poets
- By the time of Aristotle, some terms had become technical terms
 - A gradual process

Gadfly/horsefly

alogo-muia



- ἀλογο-μυῖα
 - Horsefly
- Interestingly, after Plato, it connotes a number of ideas including in Theophrastus “excessive boldness”

Failure of will

akrasia

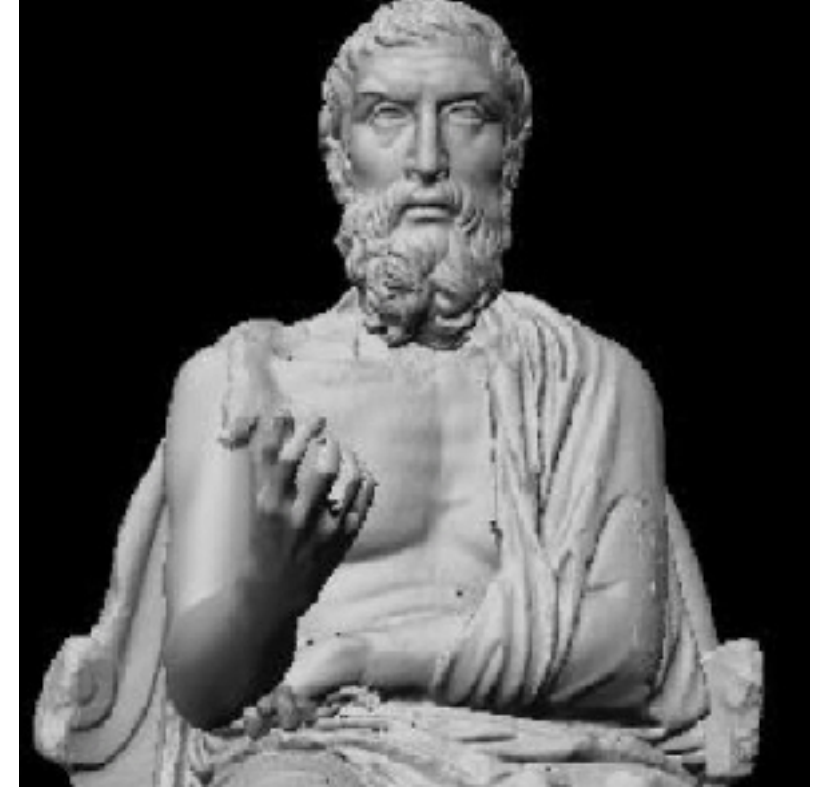
THEY HAD PLANS
TO CHANGE THE WORLD,
BUT WERE HAVING
TROUBLE FINDING A DATE
IN THEIR CALENDERS



- ἀκρασία
 - Lack of self-control, lack of command over oneself, incontinence (from *kratos*—power—so to be without power over one's self).
- For Aristotle, akrasia occurs in two ways: when we are simply overcome by our passions and act emotionally or irrationally (*propeteia* or “impetuosity”)—i.e., this is the sudden, unexpected, overwhelming of reason; when we make a rational decision to do something but fail to follow through because we are too weak willed—we know what to do, we have made the decision to do it, but we give in, perhaps due to a compelling desire or passion (*astheneia*). See the *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.1-10. When we exhibit self-control, we have *enkrateia*.

Without passion

apatheia



- ἀπάθεια
 - To be without passion (or unmoved, unaffected by passion); freedom from passion.
- An important concept in Stoicism—the goal of Stoicism is to achieve sufficient self-mastery that one is free from the passions that affect the soul, including all desires, emotions as well as pleasures and pains.

Virtue

arête



- ἀρετή
 - Virtue, excellence, can also mean goodness.
- Arete understood as “excellence” is tied to the end/goal/ or purpose of something. A thing’s excellence comes from its successfully meeting its end or goal well– excellence for a herding dog is quite different than excellence for a draft horse. Recall Meno’s description of arête/excellence for a man, for a woman, etc.—his answering Socrates with a list of virtues, each tied to something different was consistent with the common use of “arête” though of course, Socrates is looking for the definition, not examples of virtue. Many Greek philosophers offered theories about the nature of human virtue, that is, what constitutes excellence, virtue for the human being—and these theories are closely tied to what they believed was the end/goal of human life—our purpose as human beings as well as what constitutes the “good” life and the “just” life.
- Consider a key question raised in the Meno: can virtue be taught? Of course, the opening question in the Meno is not, can virtue be taught—it is, “Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue can be taught...”
“ Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue can be taught, or is acquired by practice, not teaching? Or if neither by practice nor by learning, whether it comes to mankind by nature or in some other way?”

Principle

arche



- ἀρχή
 - Archê is a “first” principle—and for some, the first principle of reality or the world.
- For the Milesian Presocratics, archê explained the fundamental principle underlying all reality. For Thales, it was water; for his student, Anaximander, it was *apeiron*, a substance without definition that gives rise to all things and to which all things return.

Tranquility

ataraxia

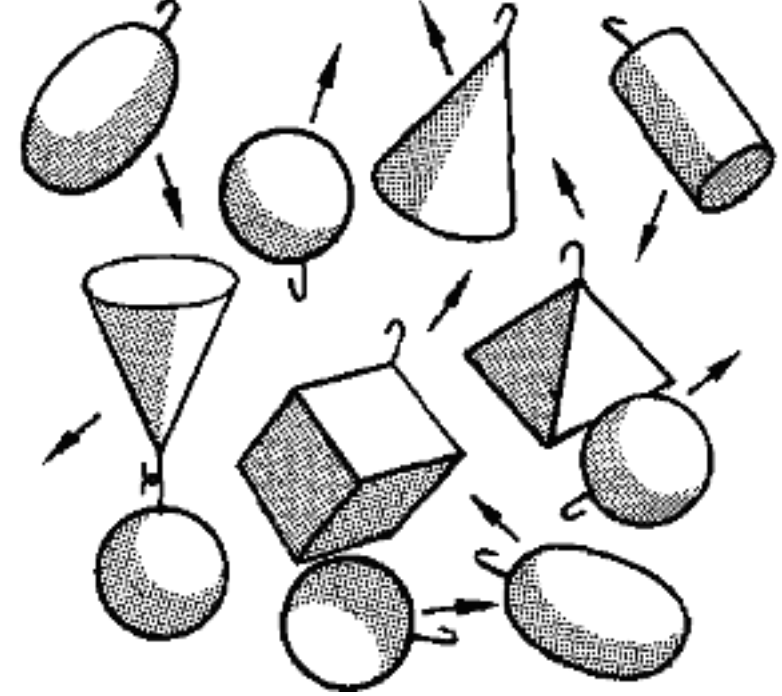


- ἀταραξία
 - To be calm, tranquil, “impassive”; freedom from disturbance.
- For the Epicureans and Sceptics, disturbances of the soul (ταραξη tarachê) were caused by pleasures/pains/emotions/desires, etc—these are the physical or psychological “stirrings” that cause unhappiness. The practice of philosophy will lead to freedom from these and thus to happiness.
- Epicurus: “one must reckon that of desires, some are natural, some groundless, and of the natural desires some are necessary and some merely natural; and of the necessary, some are necessary for happiness and some for freeing the body from troubles and some for life itself. The unwavering contemplation of these enables one to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the freedom of the soul from disturbance, since this is the goal of a blessed life.” (*Letter to Menoeceus*, Inwood/Gerson pg 29-30)

Atom

átomos

- ἄτομος
 - From α-τεμνω Literally, not-cuttable, uncuttable; something that cannot be divided further.
 - In the Presocratics, the primary element that constitutes matter and thus the material world.



Disorder

chaos



- χάος
 - Literally the abyss, darkness
- but also, for some philosophers, “the first state of the universe” and “unformed matter”

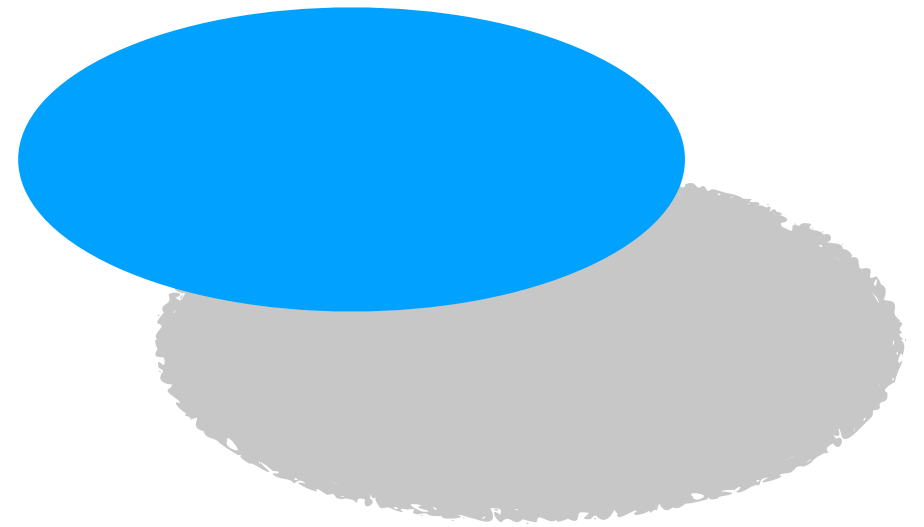
Cosmos/kosmos



- **κόσμος**
 - Order, world order—or, an ordered place/system.
- One of the ideas of the group of thinkers we classify as the Presocratics is their common view that the universe is both ordered and intelligible.
- Pythagoras is thought to be one of the first to use the term to refer to the idea of the universe “all that is” as not only an ordered place but one whose intelligibility can be explained through *nomos*—laws and numbers; the idea of kosmos as ordered and intelligible is one of the foundational concepts of Ancient Greek philosophy.

Forms

eidos



- εἶδος
 - Idea
- “Form” in Plato—universal, immaterial, necessary—what we “know” when we have knowledge; what determines the “essence” nature of something, thus both a critical ontological as well as epistemological principle.

Well-being, flourishing eudaimonia



- εὐδαιμονία

- This is the term commonly translated as happiness but better translated as “human flourishing”
- To flourish by realizing one’s ideal end/ goal, by achieving the purpose of human life with excellence or virtue, particularly in the works Plato and Aristotle.
- Eudaimonia comes from “eu” –“good” and “daimon” (δαίμων) which is a spirit, even “divine spirit” in human beings. The idea of daimon has many different forms.
- In the *Apology*, recall that Socrates mentions the daimon that speaks to him, “...something divine and godlike comes to me...I have had it from childhood. It comes as a kind of voice, and when it comes, it always turns me away from what I am about to do, but never towards it.” (31d)
- In the *Cratylus* (398b) Plato connects daimon to δαίμονες (daēmones) meaning that which has knowledge or wisdom.
- In the *Symposium*, Diotima says that love is not a god, but rather: “A great divinity, Socrates; for in fact, the whole realm of divinity is intermediate between god and mortal.” (202 d,e)
- In early Greek culture we see references to the good spirit, the *agathodaimon* (αγαθος δαίμων). The agathodaimon was associated with the health and well being of vineyards (so one often offered a libation to this spirit before drinking—remember this happens in the *Symposium*), as well as the fertility of the fields and harvests; agathodaimon could also serve as a guiding spirit (much as Socrates describes), guard against bad luck and protect from bad health, bad fortune, etc. Later Greek Hellenism posited both good and evil spirits, *eudaimons* and *kakodaimons*, (from “kako” bad or evil).
- Note that Liddell and Scott thus define eudaimonia as “blessed with a good genius; hence fortunate, happy, blest.”

Good states

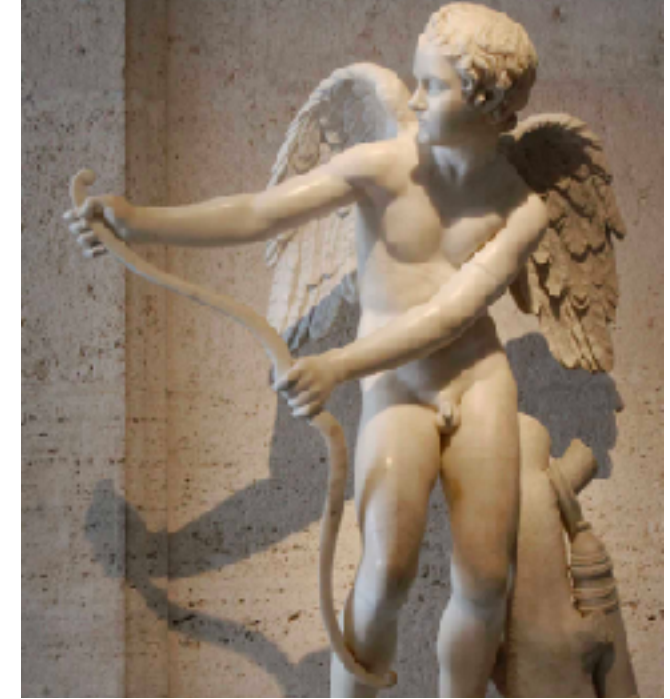
eupatheia



- **εὐπάθεια**
 - Literally, a good (*eu-*) passion in the soul.
- For the Stoics, the soul that achieves a positive state, that has virtue, has moved away from “disturbances” and the negative emotions to a balanced and detached condition.
- The eupatheia, the good states, are joy, caution/prudence, and aspiration/wish—their negative or “bad” counterparts are the states of pleasure, fear, and desire.
- The fourth negative state, pain, has no eupathic version, “since the wise man is not pained (in his soul) by anything which happens in the rational universe.” (Inwood/Gerson, pg 402)

Love

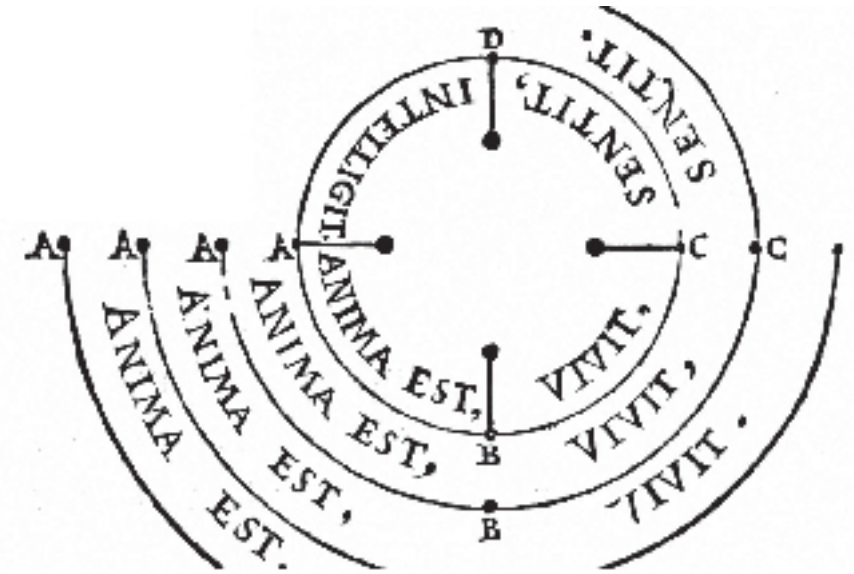
eros



- "Ερως
 - Love, more particularly, physical, passionate, “erotic” love.
- In Plato’s *Symposium*, the participants make a number of speeches about eros but it is the discourse of Diotima that defines *eros* as the philosopher, conceived by *poros*—plenty/resourcefulness and *penia*—Poverty/want.
- Consider why eros is the “subject” of this dialogue, and consider that the narrative, structure, and action exemplify Plato’s intentions as clearly as the discourse itself.

Intellect nous

- νοῦς or νους
 - Mind, Intellect
- In the Presocratics, particularly, Anaxagoras, *nous* was the *archê*/principle that maintained the order of the cosmos and was also the principle of the intelligibility of the cosmos:
 - “All other things partake in a portion of everything, while nous is infinite and self-ruled, and is mixed with nothing, but is alone, itself by itself... For it is the thinnest of all things and the purest, and it has all knowledge about everything and the greatest strength; and nous has power over all things, both greater and smaller, that have soul (DK B 12, trans. by J. Burnet)
- Plato uses “nous” to define the intellect or rational capacity of the psyche/soul; nous is what makes it possible for the soul to understand and adjust for the variability of the senses, to seek and understand the universal, to “tie down” right opinion such that it becomes knowledge.



Reason

logos



- λόγος
 - Logos comes from the verb λέγω /legō: literally to count, tell, say, or speak.
- In ancient philosophy it means reasoned speech, systematic discourse, and thus is connected to thinking/reasoning; its relationship to “logic” comes from the idea of speech as a reflection of reason or systematic thought. It is this sense of logos that was a key idea for the Presocratics, for example, Heraclitus:
 - “This logos holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it. For though all things come to be [or happen] in accordance with this logos, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each in accordance with it nature and saying how it is. But other people fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep. (Heraclitus/from Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.132=22B1)
- Logos can also signify an argument or theory, and is related to the ideas of computation, reckoning, and proportion. Consider that this is the root of the idea of offering a defense, plea or ground for something and is the idea behind the Apology—the “defense” or discourse of Socrates.

Affection

philia



- **φιλία**
 - Love but more specifically, friendship or affection/affiliation.
- Distinguish *philos* from *eros* (physical/passion) and *agape* (spiritual/unconditional) kinds of love.
- Socrates is defined as a philosopher—he “loves” and seeks wisdom.

City polis



- πόλις
 - A city, city-state—but for the classical period, more properly the community of people, body of “citizens” defined by/united by language, culture, religion, family, geography, etc.
 - The polis is a “city-state” such as Athens or Sparta, but more fundamentally, the “citizens” or defining members as a group. Thus Socrates refers not just to Athens but to the Athenians. *Polis* can also mean one’s city or country.

Soul

psuche/psyche



- ψυχή
 - Originally, life, spirit, a life-force, and in Greek philosophy, translated as “soul.”
- As Liddell and Scott indicate, in Homer *psuche* can mean “departed spirit, ghost.”
- In the Presocratics, it can mean “consciousness”, the “source of life,” and a kind of “primary substance,” eg in Heraclitus.
- For Plato and Aristotle, this is the term used to refer to an immortal, immaterial soul and the defining substance and principle (or for Aristotle, essence*) of the human being.

* Aristotle has no single term for essence. He uses variations on a phrase “what it is to be” something

Body

soma



- σῶμα
 - Body
- In dualistic theories, that the human being has both a “soul” and/or “mind” and body, the body or physical nature is called soma

Wisdom

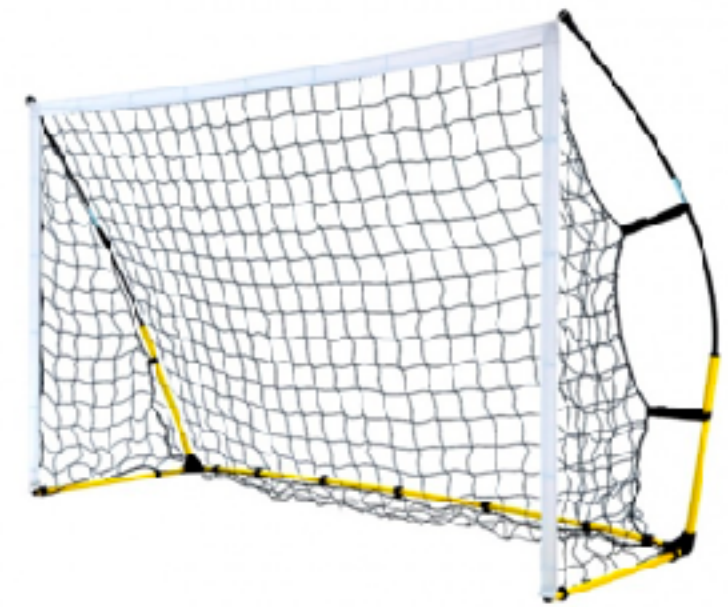
Sophia/sophos



- σοφία /σοφος
 - Wisdom, deep learning.
- Sophos can also mean a kind of sound judgment, including “practical wisdom.”
- It was Socrates’ statement that the Oracle at Delphi had deemed him the wisest man in Athens that frames the discussion in the *Apology* as to what wisdom is and in what way that Socrates is wise.
 - (“μείζω τινὰ ἢ κατ’ ἄνθρωπον σοφίαν σοφοί” Plato, *Apology*, 20e)

Goal

Telos



- τέλος
 - state of completion or maturity, the end or purpose of action
- In Greek philosophy the *telos* is the full realisation or ideal of a living being. Ethical actions are taken *in order to* attain the *telos* in Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics* 1094a18, and *teloí* are “final cause” of living beings and their properties.
- Teleology is the proposition that end points are the reason why some being has a property of some sort. Final causes were attached in the early modern period by Francis Bacon, who called them “sterile virgins”.

Sources

- Definitions above substantially based on
 - Henry George Liddell. Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones. with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1940.
 - Also available on the Perseus website: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text.jsp?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057>