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## Major Philosophical Schools

### *Epicureanism*

- Traces its origins to Epicurus (341–270 BCE).
- Allows for free will, questioning the role of fate (or of the gods) to determine human lives.
- Pleasure is the ultimate goal of life, but true pleasure is found through the attainment of tranquility (freedom from anxiety), not through simple gratification of desires.
- Those seeking true pleasure exercise their free will to enjoy good things in moderation and to make responsible choices that improve their lives and the lives of others.
- Likewise, followers avoid those things that lead to disappointment, pain, or grief (romantic love, emotional attachment, political commitments, devotion to material things).
- Rejects any sense of afterlife: what meaning life has is to be found here and now.
- Sometimes degenerated into a notion of freedom from accountability or responsibility (rather than from anxiety); Epicureans were then regarded as “pleasure seekers” in a crass sense, and the philosophy was viewed as a license for self-indulgence.

## ***Stoicism***

- Traces its origins to Zeno (333–264 BCE), reshaped by Epictetus in the first century CE.
- Everything is predetermined; history is cyclical and repetitious.
- Virtue is what matters most in life, and it is attainable through acceptance of fate.
- Those seeking virtue appreciate the logic of the universe (called Logos or Reason) and are indifferent to circumstances (“no reason for joy, still less for grief”).
- Epictetus accentuated the moral obligation of virtue: love and respect for all people, whose merits and station in life lie beyond their control.

## ***Cynicism***

- Traces its origins to Diogenes of Sinope (ca. 410–324 BCE).
- More lifestyle than dogma; emphasizes radical authenticity and independence.
- Authenticity is attained through repudiation of shame: no embarrassment over bodily features or functions; no concern for reputation or status.
- Independence is attained through renunciation of what cannot be obtained freely, by embracing simplicity and voluntary poverty and desiring to have only what is natural and necessary.

- Cynics employed diatribe for pedagogical instruction, a style of teaching or argument that uses rhetorical questions to engage in conversation with an imaginary partner.

### ***Pythagoreanism***

- Traces its origins to Pythagora of Samos (ca. 570–495 BCE), a mathematician.
- Intelligence is to be valued above all else; memory is thus highly prized.
- The pursuit of intelligence involves a reasoning process that seeks single hypotheses to explain all relevant facts.
- But truth also has a mystical side, as is illustrated in the power of music, which is highly mathematical, and yet can heal disease and affect appetites.
- In accord with the appreciation of music, success in life is measured through the attainment of harmony (of ideas, of body and soul, etc.).
- The goal of harmony may be achieved through intelligence, when employed with radical honesty.

### ***Middle Platonism***

- Traces its origins to Plato (ca. 425–423 BCE), the influential Athenian philosopher, with development of ideas that would

eventually crystallize into Neoplatonism under the influence of Plotinus (204–270 CE).

- Articulated especially by Plutarch (45–125 CE) and highly influential on both the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria (30 BCE–45 CE) and the Christian theologian Origen (185–245 CE).
- Posits the existence of a creative first principle, the intermediaries of which account for various world religions.
- The material world is but a type or shadow of an intellectual reality that might be represented as the Logos (rational principle or “thoughts of god”).
- Insists on freedom of the will—divine providence involves cooperation between human will and divine agency.
- Emphasizes the immortality of the human soul, leaving open possibilities of transmigration or reincarnation, but denying death in the absolute sense that implies cessation of one’s essential, rational being.
- The goal of life often involves preserving a purity of the soul that recognizes the value of truth, reason, and ideas, avoiding the corruption of what is false, temporal or material.