Thesis
on
Roman Philosophy
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Hattie M. Boggs
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School of Ancient Languages.

ILLINOIS-INDUSTRIAS
University
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Roman Philosophy was very intimately connected with Grecian, the Romans indeed founding no new schools themselves, but what they were of Philosophy in Rome being derived directly from the Greek. The earliest Romans were warriors and politicians, who thought that their whole life should be devoted to the service of their country and for both rhetoric and philosophy being taught there to the Roman youth.

The first philosophers of note that came to Rome were Diogenes a Stoic, Butolaus a Peripatetic, and Pammas a New Academician. Pammas and his doctrines were especially hateful to the Romans, for he declared that there were as many arguments to be brought forward to show that wrong was right, as that right was right, and by his subtle reasonings proved the false saying true. His discourse captivated the Roman youth and rekindled the interest in philosophy which a few years before had been smothered but not extinguished by the senate.
The reasons for their great dislike of philosophy were, first, it tended to spread disbelief in their state religion by which the oligarchy was in a great measure maintained. Second, it distracted men's minds, and diverted them from the entire devotion to public life which the ancient customs demanded. The senate could forbid philosophy being taught in Rome, but they could not prevent the young men of the state from going to Athens to study and learn from the great teachers of that city, a thing which many of them did.

Although Barccades and his companions taught philosophy at Rome to some extent the true and study and origin of this science at that city may be dated from the time that the Achates hostages were taken to Rome. Among them were several philosophers the most distinguished of whom was Polibius, who while there was the intimate friend of Lelius and Scipio. These two men became philosophers of some note in their time, but none of their writings remain to us.
Other public men of Rome now began to take an interest in philosophy, the two most popular schools being the Stoic and the Epicurean. The school of the New Academy was afterward adopted by many, especially among the orators, it being particularly well adapted for argument. They never affirmed anything positively, but only said this seems like the truth. The wise, true, public men of Rome joined themselves to the Stoic school. This school was founded by Zeno about 300 B.C. He had been a disciple of Socrates, but he wished to found a school that would profess positive knowledge, which the Socratic school did not. The Stoics divided philosophy into three parts: logic, physiology, and ethics; placing logic first. Zeno taught that if philosophy that the soul was mortal, that it was fire, a portion of the soul of the world, and that it was destructible. They believed it consisted of eight powers of which understanding was the chief. They believed it consisted in a real, living God and taught
that virtue was absolute good, they regarded it as the
sumnum bonum and vice as absolute evil, there was no
middle ground, and also that virtue was based on wisdom.
The most noted of the followers of Seneca among
the Romans were Seneca, the tutor of Nero, who was one
of the first to distinguish between scholastic and practical
philosophy, the latter of which he regarded as the most
useful, its first doctrines being individual morality.
Epicurus a slave who afterward established a school at
Hierapolis, and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus the philosopher
Emperor who imparted a spirit of gentleness to his philosophy,
by making it subordinate to religion and a love of mankind.
Seneca had been an advocate of suicide, the two latter were
at least less so.

Epicureanism was very popular among a certain class at Rome.
Epicurus was the founder of this school. When young he had
attended the schools of Xenocrates and the Academicians.
He first established his school at Lampasaeus and then removed to Athens. His easy and pleasant doctrine soon attracted a number of followers. He was indulgent to sensual vice, and taught elegance of address, refinement in social life, and release from all superstition were to be sought.

Ethics was the principal part of his system. There was not much of originality in his theories but they addressed themselves pleasingly to those who preferred pleasure to virtue. His own life was so upright that even his adversaries could say little against him. He had some distinguished followers at Rome, prominent among whom were Lucetius, who wrote De Natura Rumin, a work of considerable merit, and later Horace. The latter however in his writings was not a strong advocate of Epicureanism, especially in some of his later works. The first who made this school popular among the higher classes were Aquininas and Rabinias.

The Peripatetic school of Philosophy was one founded by
Cicero, one of the greatest of Grecian philosophers and logicians, but his doctrines did not find much favor among the Romans, they were too speculative and theoretical for them. He taught philosophy was a science arising out of the love of knowledge, we obtained this knowledge by reasoning, logic, therefore was the instrument of all philosophy. He was originally a follower of Plato.

Another Grecian school whose teachings some of the Romans adopted was the New Academy, founded by Arcesilaus of Pitane in Aetolia. Some of the doctrines of Socrates called in question and began to criticize the different schools, in that way he acquired the habit of doubting. This method of criticizing was taught in order that the way might be found for wide inquiry and deeper research into the truth and reason of things.

The most prominent philosopher of this school, as well as the greatest of Rome, was Cicero. The academicians asserted only one thing positively and that is that we know nothing.
They were entirely given up to skepticism. They were the first who had confessed that they were not able to ascertain the truth and they were willing to consider uncertainty and impossibility the chief attainable good. In this they differed widely from the Stoics but in many points there was a strong resemblance. More indeed considered as belonging to the New Academy but his philosophy was rather eclectic, resembling the Stoics in that he thought virtue the highest good. He also borrowed opinions or rather adopted some of the ideas of the Epicureans.

In his later years when the republic had virtually ended and his country was no longer willing to accept his studies, instead of abandoning himself to grief and idleness he spent his time in philosophical pursuits, which was congenial employment for him. One time and once only was he known to say that philosophy was the true study of life. His Roman spirit immediately returned and at times the opportunity offered he resumed public duties.
He wrote a great number of philosophical works, many of which are still extant. They are many of them at least written as dialogues, that being better suited to the argumentative style of the Academicians. Some of his works are De Amicitia, De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum, De Republica, De Natura Deorum, De Consolatione, a book written for his own comfort at the death of his daughter Julia. In this book he showed the spirit of a true philosopher by attempting to comfort himself in his grief by his reasonings.

The Eusebian Disputations are philosophical works of great merit. At times there seems to be contradictions in his works, he appearing sometimes in some of his letters to deny the immortality of the soul, but in his works where he is giving his whole thought and study to that theme, he very plainly asserts his belief in a future life for the soul.
When it is situated in man or what it is he does not pretend to know but he says it certainly is within man and is simple and indestructible and has nothing earthly or concrete about it.

He thinks after life there are different places assigned for the abode of the good and evil. The souls of those that are good return high in the heavens, for he claims that that is whence they came, that they were not produced but always existed, a first principle. Those that are grosser, more mixed with evils and contaminations of the earth ascend less high. They are too heavy to be carried far above the earth. The proofs that he gives for his belief in the immortality of the soul were that it is self-moving and hence perpetually active. And another was the dislike of all men of the thought of annihilation and their desire for a future life.
He argued that desire would not have been created if it could not be gratified.

Many of the ancient Grecian philosophers held much the same opinions, the Stoics and the Peripatetics inclined to this belief. It was one of the favorite doctrines of the greatest of Grecian philosophers Plato.

The Epicureans denied the immortality of the soul; this view being more congenial to the life of pleasure which they wished to lead. Most of the other ideas advanced by Socrates were the same of those of the Greeks. Very little of his philosophy was original; he merely studied a great number of Grecian philosophers and such of their views as accorded with his, he made his own. They are however so strongly marked by his own sympathies, mind, character and his own language that the thought seems new.

He exposed without restraint the loose morals
and theories of the Epicureans, but he is not ready to accept all the positive and severe doctrines of the Stoics.

He expresses a firm belief in a deity and gives as one proof, much as would be given now, that if the world was created there must have been a creator and if it was not created if it always existed there must be some one to rule it, to order all things wisely for the use of man and he thinks also that man partakes of the divine nature.

The eclectic school of which Cicero was the most noted follower became important during the time of the empire. It was the belief that all the sects had some good and some ill in them and the students thought that they could separate the true from the false and select from the different schools such doctrines as were pleasing to them and which they thought to be true.
thinking in this way to build up a perfect system. But instead they only succeeded in gathering together an unshapely and inconsistent mass without a good foundation or symmetry and strength in the building. Plutarch was also an eclectic philosopher though many claimed that he was a Platonist. He adopted some of the theories of Plato, of Aristotle, of Pythagoras but he was always opposed to the Epicureans and the Stoics.

In those fearful days of the Roman Empire after the death of Augustus there was nothing but the Stoic philosophy that could uphold and comfort the followers of the old religion.

There were several notable names during those times among whom were Tertullian and Juvenal. But the most famous were Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. The latter spent much of his time in philosophical reflections and as a philosopher among the Romans.
he is second only to Platonico. He made the Stoic philosophy his rule of life and it was his religion. His works are different from those of Platonico, since they are merely his reflections and thoughts which he wrote down for his own benefit.

About this time Platonism was very popular in Rome, one of its strongest advocates being Apuleius. They made the doctrines of Plato the basis of their belief, but so inverted them that they were scarcely able to be recognized. They mingled his teachings with ancient mysteries and with those of Pythagoras and Aristotle and pursued such themes as the Deity, the Creator, the soul of the world, the origin of the world, and evil.

They claimed that the gods were of two kinds, visible and invisible, of which the sun, moon and stars are visible and put in a type of the invisible, of which it seemed strange anyone should have believed them to be the
Teachings of Plato but it was what they wished for and it became quite popular.

Thus it can be seen that the Roman philosophy was derived almost entirely from the Greek and yet there are many points of difference between them. The Greeks pursued it for the sake of finding out the truth and for the love of abstract reasoning, the Romans only so far as they could make it practical.

In Athens although there was great difference in theory and much argument between the Epicureans and Stoics, yet little difference could be seen in their lives. Not so with the Romans, the chief difference with them was in their habit of life. For many years philosophy and rhetoric were thus opposed to each other, some of the earlier philosophers affecting to despise learning but later they became famous as rhetoricians. Philosophy however was rather revered by this for they paid more attention
to the style than the subject.

Philosophy continued to be the state religion of the Romans until the Christian period. Christianity and philosophy for a time were entirely disunited and even were hostile to each other, but the Greeks afterward asserted that they accorded and they were finally recognized as advancing the same doctrines in a degree. Christianity however was always regarded as much higher and more spiritual, philosophy as earthy and human.