

Humanities I

Unit 5. Athens: The Ideals

Greek Concepts of the Afterlife

The knowledge derived from this chapter may be reduced to the three following statements:-

- A. Homer's conception of the afterlife--
that it is worse than life on earth
- B. Epicurus's conception of the after life--that it is merely the absence of feeling and thought.
- C. Socrates's conception of the afterlife-- that it is a better life than life on earth because it provides contact between all great men of all eras.d

Discuss the relationship between the afterlife and the way in which a man lives earthly life.

What do you think is meant by the definition (Socrates') of a good man, as one who devotes his life "to seeking the truth."

How would you live your life if you believed you were going to Homer's afterlife? to Epicurus's?

If you believed you had to get as much out of life as possible, how would you live? How would you know you were getting the most out of life?

Since death holds no punishment for earthly behaviour, wouldn't Homer's and Epicurus' views of the afterlife encourage men to be lazy and selfish?

Some modern atheist humanists have developed standards of the good man, unrelated to eternal reward or eternal punishment, what might some of these standards be? Who would enforce them if there is no reward or punishment after death?

What things must a human being do to fulfill his promise of humanity? What opinions do you have on the prospect of self-destruction if one does not fulfill the best in one's nature?

What changes did the advent of Christianity--the promise of eternal life of the spirit--bring to the ideas expressed in this unit by the Greek philosopher Epicurus and the poet Homer? How close did the idea expressed by Socrates come to the concepts of Christianity?

Supplemental reading and research:

The Last Days of Socrates:

The Five Great Philosophies of Life

Both these books are part of the classroom library. Certain sections will be given as mandatory class reading.