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GREEK PHILOSOPHERS



The Hellenic Spirit created a vast number of Philosophical schools which consisted the source of the modern Western Philosophical thought.

EFSTATHIADIS GROUP

Poseidonius (135-51 B.C.)

Poseidonius, born in Apamea in Syria, is considered by general admittance, equal to Aristotle in knowledge and intelligence. For him philosophy is love of wisdom (sophia-σοφία) which, in turn, is defined as knowledge of divine and human affairs as well as of their causes. Poseidonius re-introduced a religious element into Stoicism by teaching, in addition, that we tend to the divine by means of virtue (arete). The soul comes from God and it finds itself on earth because it fell from the heavens because of a sin due to which it was sentenced to imprisonment in the body. Nevertheless, precisely because it comes from God, that is, it is part of the divine breath, it strives to return to its "lost Paradise." Great effort is required for the soul to reach the heavens through a life of virtue. This means that the soul goes through continual trials so as to become worthy of a return to the divine. This can be achieved only by those who manage to put aside desires of the body and keep the divine part of their hypostasis pure, free from corporal desires.

Poseidonius regarded the "know thyself" of the Delphic oracle as knowledge of the spiritual substance of the human soul as well as of that to which it is to return. Comprehension of the above will lead man to realize that he belongs to the "commonwealth of the Universe" (Πολιτεία τοῦ Σύμπαντος) to which all things, human and divine, belong. All the efforts made by science, civilization in general, and philosophy, more specifically, aim to re-establish man's connection with God. Consequently science, according to Poseidonius, has a

moral destiny in that it contributes to man's perception of the world.

We can see that Poseidonius' work completes a religious and philosophical effort which starts from clear scientific knowledge and ends with the unexplored depths of a refined mysticism. This mysticism does not have a religious nature. We must not forget Poseidonius' belief that the Universe is divine (ἐνθεος), meaning that God's spirit gives everything life and soul. One of Poseidonius' most important assertions is that if we set sail from the furthest point west and have a constant easterly wind we will reach the Indies. This assertion was accepted by the Italian Tascanelli who worked out the maps with which Columbus set out for the Indies and in the end discovered America instead. Poseidonius' aforementioned assertion may be found in his Peri Oceanou where he furthermore explains the tidal phenomenon in relation to the moon and expounds interesting theories on the influence of climate on man's constitution. He elsewhere explains the appearance and development of religions with the same faculty of analysis. He maintains that in the beginning all men had one religion which came from the wonder the stars caused, the fear of the consequences of bad deeds, etc. Primitive people were closer to God than later generations which had religious customs etc. Prescribed by legislators who invested them with coercive force.

Of course we must not forget Poseidonius' theories that the cosmos is hierarchically made up of inorganic matter, planets, animals and man. Everything in them as well as relations between them is actuated by an order set by the wisdom of God. Nevertheless, there exist two worlds: the earthly one which is perishable/subject to

decay and the heavenly one which is imperishable. The two worlds are connected by, or rather, to use Poseidonius' term are "linked" by, man who through his body participates in the decay of the earthly world and through his soul participates in the imperishability of the heavenly world. Thus the two worlds meet each other in man. There also exist other intelligent beings besides man. As he says in his Peri Heroon Kae Daemonon (On Heroes and Daemons) the air is full of such beings with which communication is possible. According to Poseidonius and Stoic philosophy the God about whom so much had been said had no form but could nevertheless take on any form. He wished to. God essentially is a fiery breath with the ability to understand. Poseidonius moreover believed in the power of divination and justified it on the strength of the "sympathy" which rules the universe in mutual relationships of parts of an organic whole. He made important observations about the moments when the bond between body and soul is relaxed, e.g. sleep, ecstasy, and when the soul can even perceive the future.

Poseidonius received many honours in Rhodes where he settled and lived. He was especially honoured by the Emperor Pompeius as well as the inhabitants of Rhodes, who sent him to Rome as their representative. Many Roman nobles became his pupils there. Prior to Poseidonius' stay in Rome, Cicero had visited him and had attended his lectures. The history of philosophy acknowledges his magnificent effort to make all the conclusions of the whole of Greek philosophy useful in a recapitulatory composition by putting them together.