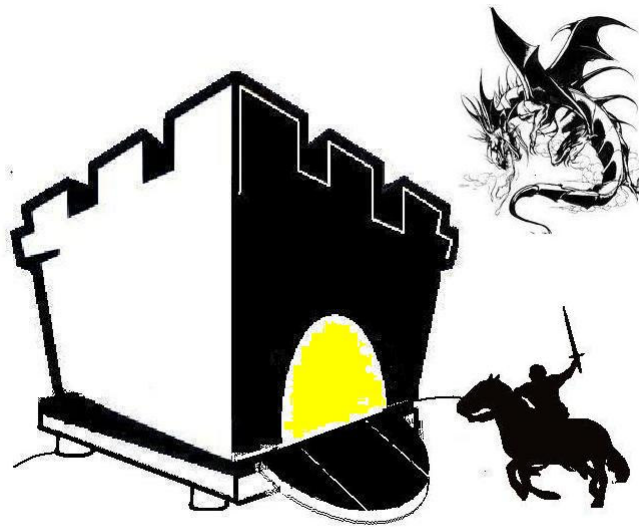

Fortress Living



Three Solutions for Your Greatest Problems in Life

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Lesson Six

Ancient Solutions to the Greatest Problems in Life Seven Historical Periods

PERIOD	YEARS	Normative Solutions (Philosophy and Theology)	Situational Solutions (Arts and Culture)	Relational Solutions (Ethics and Spirituality)
Ancient	5 th Century BC to 5 th Century AD	The State Gives Norms ----- <i>Rationalism</i>	Classicism ----- Stauary	* Ethical Hedonism * Bad: religious persecution * Good: religious purification
Medieval	500 AD to 1400	The Church Gives Norms ----- <i>Scholasticism</i>	Mysticism ----- Byzantine	* Ethical Legalism * Bad: Biblical illiteracy * Good: Piety and Devotion
Renaissance	1400 to 1600	Reason Gives Norms ----- <i>Humanism</i>	Naturalism ----- Giotto	* Ethical Dualism * Bad: compartmentalization * Good: helpful inventions
Enlightenment	1600 to 1800	Liberty Gives Norms ----- <i>Rational Idealism</i>	Neoclassicism ----- Beethoven and J.L David	* Ethical Utopianism * Bad: idolatry of the state * Good: religious liberty
Scientific	1800 to 1900	Science Gives Norms ----- <i>Empiricism</i>	Romanticism ----- R. Wagner <i>Ring Cycle</i>	* Ethical Positivism * Bad: reason over revelation * Good: reasons to believe
Modern	1900 to 2000	Self Gives Norms ----- <i>Pragmatism</i>	Impressionism ----- Monet <i>Poplars at Giverney</i>	* Ethical Individualism * Bad: social isolation * Good: inner spirituality
Post-modern	2000 and Beyond	No Norms ----- <i>Nihilism</i>	Deconstructionism ----- Picasso <i>Le Demoiselles</i>	* Ethical Relativism * Bad: reject tradition * Good: truth alone

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PERIOD	YEARS	Normative Solutions (Philosophy and Theology)	Situational Solutions (Arts and Culture)	Relational Solutions (Ethics and Spirituality)
Ancient	5 th Century BC to 5 th Century AD	The State Gives Norms ----- <i>Rationalism</i>	Classicism ----- Statuary	* Ethical Hedonism * Bad: religious persecution * Good: religious purification

The Period: 5th Century BC to 5th Century AD

The ancient period could begin as far back as the dawn of human civilization and the first settlements and cities of the ancient middle east—the Macedonians, Sumerians and Egyptians. This was perhaps several thousand years before the time of Christ. But we will begin with the Greeks and Romans for even though these earlier civilizations offered solutions to the problems of life it wasn't until the Greeks that philosophy itself was systematically and formally articulated.

Also, the dates I have chosen—the 5th century BC (before Christ's birth) to the 5th century AD (after Christ's birth) are somewhat arbitrary. They are only used for convenience. There was a great deal going on in ancient philosophy before that. But that is where we will begin our examination of normative, situational and relational solutions to the great problems of life.

Dominant Normative Solutions: Rationalism

In the generations leading up to the 5th century BC, the Greeks had grown weary of wars and skeptical of religion. It was a time of confusion and doubt. Professional teachers, known as “sophists” wandered through the various city-states of Greece trying to convince the citizens that they alone had the answers to life's greatest questions: and if they would just come up with some money, they would gladly share them! That word “sophistry” has come down to us in our day and describes someone who simply talks but without meaning or consequence. That was the state of knowledge in ancient Greece when a man named Socrates came on the scene.

I cannot spend a great deal of time developing all of the ideas that led to Socrates' ascendancy as one of the most influential philosophers of all time. Let me just say that the normative solutions he offered to the great problems of life are covered by the term “rationalism.” For Socrates, and the famous pupils that followed him—Plato and Aristotle—the rules and norms for life came from rational thought. Hence the term, “rationalism.”

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As a philosophy of life, rationalism sought to address the great problems of failure, pain and danger through an unbridled confidence in the power of the human mind to discover truth.

In the generation leading up to Socrates, thinkers had invented all sorts of answers to the question, “what is truth?” Again, we don’t have time to trace that development, but by the time Socrates came on the scene, everyone had grown skeptical that there was any way to know. Socrates believed he was saving civilization from itself by introducing a novel normative solution.

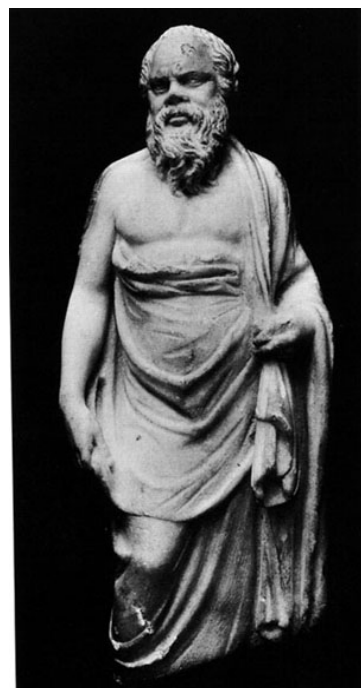
His normative solution stated that there were actually *two* realms of knowledge: like two floors in a house. The “lower” floor was the realm of sensory knowledge. We see, hear, taste, touch and smell individual things. It was the realm of experience. However, there is another realm of knowledge—a second story in the house of knowledge. It is actually an unseen world—the realm of universal ideas. Whereas the lower floor is the particular things, it is simply the reflection of another world—of universal ideas we cannot see.

How do we know about this upper story? Through reason. This is why Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are called the fathers of “rationalism.”

UPPER LEVEL: Universal Ideals
(Known by Reason)

LOWER LEVEL: Particular Things
(Known by Experience)

On the other hand, these ancient rationalists weren’t prepared to entrust every human being with this enormous power. In those days, society was rigidly classified into those who had power and those who did not. One of Socrates’ students, Plato, envisioned a perfect society (called *The Republic*) in which the greatest problems of life were rationally explained, not by everyone but by an elite group of “philosopher kings” whose powers of reason were particularly adept. In effect, the result was enormous confidence in the ability of the ruling class to use their powers of deductive reason to establish norms and rules by which everyone else lived. While in theory this sounds plausible, it did not work well at all. The State was ultimately incapable of using this power and not abusing it. Over her long history, Greece and then Rome experienced periods of enormous political and social conflict as first one ruler, then another, exploited this power for personal advantage.



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Dominant Situational Solutions: Classicism

Throughout history, running parallel to the dominant philosophical, theological and political traditions is another realm. The philosophers, theologians and politicians attempt to create normative solutions by which to address the greatest problems of their time. But it's up to the artists and craftsmen to create situational ones for, as we have seen, normative solutions are devised in the processing of thought while situational ones emerge from the processing of affections and emotions. Recall that situational solutions take the various experiences and information of life and attempt to organize and arrange it in a meaningful way. In this ancient period, the dominant way of doing this was an artistic school we can call Classicism.

Classicism was a direct outworking of the philosophy of rationalism, with its two story world of universal ideas and particular things. The artists saw their purpose in art as to embody those universal ideas as much as possible in their art.

For example, one of the most familiar artistic expressions of ancient Greece was its statuary. Like the pyramids of Egypt, the statues of Greece and Rome were understood to be more than portrait likenesses of famous people. They were attempts to universalize and immortalize them—to use features of the person to provide a window into the upper story of perfect ideals. Take this famous statue of the Discus thrower. Though we don't know the name of the person sculpted, it is obvious that the purpose of the sculptor went beyond mere likeness and representation. It intended to embody a "perfect athlete."



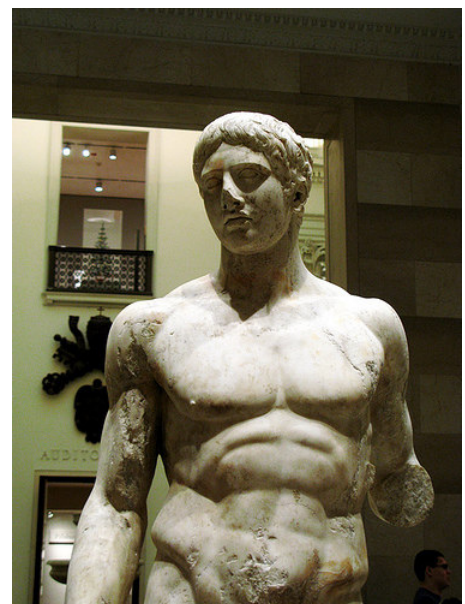
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In the Greek and Roman statues of prominent leaders we see the blending of the normative and situational solutions. Take this famous statue of Caesar Augustus, the ruler during the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem:



Even a casual observation of this statue demonstrates the point that the sculptor was not simply trying to display a likeness of a man. Many books have been written about the meaning of the various features: the way his finger points (military commander), the folds of his robe, the images on his breastplate (religious themes) and the curious little being at his feet (Cupid, riding a dolphin). There was one overarching purpose to this kind of artistic expression. Caesar was not just a man—not even just a military hero. He was a god. The “classicism” is seen in the way those themes are displayed. Classicism means drawing from old, traditional (classical) styles. Thus, for example the pose he strikes and the features of his robe were reminiscent of older Greek statues from the 5th century BC called the Doryphoros, pictured here.

By using the styles and techniques of this older Greek “classic,” the Roman sculptor was attempting to establish continuity with the past, and perhaps to demonstrate that the Roman art form and civilization was simply a continuation of all that was good in the Greek.



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Dominant Relational Solutions: Ethical Hedonism

Relational solutions are developed to address the greatest problem of fear. Historically, they are best studied in the ethics of a people, for ethics and spirituality embody the way we are supposed to relate to one another. Thinkers like Plato and Aristotle spent considerable paper and ink on the subject of ethics and the ethical systems evolved gradually through the thousand year period we're considering. It would be a mistake to say there was one ethical system in ancient Greece and Rome. That was part of the problem: there were too many. And many were incompatible. But I'm going to focus on one that gives a good example of what happens to relationships when rationalism is the guiding normative solution. It's called Ethical Hedonism. It's most famous proponent was Epicurus.

Living 300 BC, Epicurus argued that the goal of life is happiness. The word "hedon" is Greek for "pleasure." A life of happiness was not simply doing whatever you wanted. It was a life characterized by "ataraxia" (peace) and "aponia" (no pain). Epicurus valued relationships and said that it was through our friendships that we attain these states of pleasure. So important were these concepts of pleasure and peace that Epicurus argued that they determine what is good and evil. The gods do not reward or punish humans for doing one or the other. The punishment or reward are the result of our own pursuits. As a result, man need not be afraid of the gods or of death. There is no life after death to fear. What we ultimately have is right now. And we should enjoy every moment because once it's gone, it will be no more.

The Epicurian philosophy, with its emphasis on pleasure, became very popular! It also opened the door to many excesses. If, as Epicurus believed, all that matters most is the present moment, and that pleasure is its own reward, there is little incentive to plan for the future or restrain ourselves with self-control. Thus, Epicurian lifestyle became synonymous with such social perversions and gluttony, drunkenness and sexual promiscuity. By the time of the later Roman Empire, even after Epicurus was forgotten, his libertine lifestyle remained. The normative solutions proffered in the early days—a life of reflection, reason and virtue, guided by "philosopher kings" was discarded in favor of the live for the moment ethic. The religions of Rome reflect some of this. The most popular religious expression, especially during the time of the early Christian church, was what were called "mystery cults." The most famous of these was "Mithraism." Though mystery cults purported to offer secret knowledge of the hidden "mysteries" of truth, what they really did was provide an excuse for all sort of sexual and selfish perversion, in the name of religion. There are many examples of this in the New Testament, where temple prostitution, witchcraft, and old fashioned financial greed were the underlying reasons for its popularity.

Needless to say, a society that championed this sort of practice in relationships could not survive long.

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The Limits of Rationalism

It would be a mistake to describe only the skills of the Greek and Roman artists or the intelligence and brilliance of its philosophers. They had a great deal. But toward the later period of Roman history, the arts and religion fell into debauchery and the ethics and spirituality declined.

- **The Ancient Foundation –The Norms of Life**



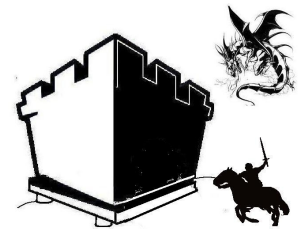
When Rome finally fell, around 500 AD, it was ultimately not because of external forces. Yes, there were warriors on all sides, fighting for their own survival. There were the Germanic tribes from the north and the Persians from the east. African assaults came from the south. And while these posed serious threats, they were not nearly the threat from within.

That's because the "fortress" they were building was never capable of standing forever. The foundation upon which Greece and Rome was built—the norms and laws—were good but not perfect. Rationalism as a guiding principle was ultimately incapable of solving the greatest problems in their lives: the problems of danger, pain and failure. And Rome fell.

- **The Ancient Structure –The Situations of Life**

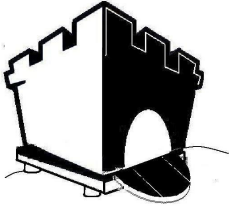
The situations of life are reflected in the arts and culture. As sensitive men, the artists and craftsmen use their work to make whatever sense they can of the situations of life. In this period, one of the ways situational solutions were given expression was in the statuary. As we saw, statues of famous people were more than aesthetic likenesses. They were designed to communicate the rationalistic philosophy and also the power and perfection of human leaders—to transform a man like Caesar Augustus into a god. Initially, they did so via an artistic tradition known as "classicism"—reaching back to traditions and techniques from generations past to try and demonstrate a continuity with the past.

Even so, this classicism did not hold, particularly in the waning days of the Empire. Artists and craftsmen were increasingly uninterested or incapable of excellence. The visual arts, the music, even the coinage of the later period is markedly inferior to what came before. If a particular work of art or craft were like a "brick" in the "castle," it's as if the bricks were all crumbling. No wonder the fortress that was Rome collapsed when attacked by the dragons from the north, south, east and west.



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- **The Ancient Access – The Relationships of Life**



The most tragic limit of all is when access to the offered solutions to the greatest problems of life is damaged. In other words, when the “bridge” to whatever structure we are building is so cracked and flawed it breaks under foot. Practically, this means that the day-to-day relationships of people do not provide any answers to our greatest problems. They are the problem. In Rome, this collapse was evident in the perversion and corruption of its religion and ethics. The philosophy of Hedonism, when lived out in mystery cults like Mithraism, became rationalizations and excuses for horribly exploitive lifestyles and the age-old corruptions of power and money.

Around 500 years after the time of Jesus, the old building could no longer stand and Rome fell under its own weight. The normative, situational and relational solutions to the great problems of life were not sufficient.



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Quiz 6 Questions

1. What approximate years are covered during this Ancient Period of history?
 - a. 100 BC to 100 AD
 - b. 500 BC to 1000 AD
 - c. 500 BC to 500 AD

2. The dominant normative solution of the Ancient Period was:
 - a. Scholasticism
 - b. Existentialism
 - c. Rationalism

3. The sculptor of Caesar Augustus utilized a style of art we call
 - a. Classicism
 - b. Narcissism
 - c. Rationalism

4. The founder of the dominant relational solution of the Ancient Period was named
 - a. Epicurus
 - b. Epictetus
 - c. Epilonious