The Greek Way Study Guide

The Greek Way by Edith Hamilton

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Twelve chapters of the book were published in 1930 under the Title "The Greek Way." In 1942, five new chapters were published with the original twelve under the title "The Great Age of Greek Literature." Current editions have retained the original title for the complete book and included the preface to the 1942 edition.

"The Greek Way" is an attempt to present to the modern reader an understanding and appreciation of the unique and distinctive cultural, intellectual and artistic achievements of Classical Athens. In particular, Hamilton focuses on fifth-century Athens, a time of significant political, social and intellectual change.

The unique and unparalleled achievements of fifth-century Athens are defined and delineated against both the intellectual, cultural and religious life of surrounding nations and the changing struggles and needs of Athenian culture itself. Comparison with other nations and cultures of the period emphasizes the distinction Hamilton draws between the life of the mind and the life of the spirit, between the rational and the irrational responses of human culture to pain, sorrow and fear. Comparison of Athenian writers of the period allows her to sketch changing responses to changing circumstances in Athenian society during this period.

Hamilton's intention in writing the book is clearly stated in the Preface to the 1942 edition as providing "a picture of Greek thought and art at the time of their highest achievement." Her goal is to provide to the modern reader a "perception of the breadth and depth and splendor of the intellectual life in fifth-century Athens."

Although the intention behind the book might have been originally more purely academic, as she wrote the Preface to the 1942 edition Hamilton was acutely aware of the abiding value of the Athenian intellectual achievement for later generations as they struggled to cope with difficult, confusing and frightening times. Indeed, much of the world was overwhelmed with confusion, fear and suffering in 1942.

There is, perhaps, no clearer statement of the abiding value of an understanding of the culture and art of fifth-century Athens for later generations than that contained in Hamilton's Preface. "We have many silent sanctuaries in which we can find a breathing space to free ourselves from the personal, to rise above our harassed and perplexed minds and catch sight of values that are stable, which no selfish and timorous preoccupations can make waver, because they are the hard-won and permanent possession of humanity."

The singular achievement of fifth-century Athenian culture was a unique intellectual balance in thought and life. These Athenians, she says, were uniquely able - throughout all of human history - to achieve the balance of mind and spirit, of intellect and religion that is the hallmark of human sanity. These Athenians were able to ascend to the intellectual heights that understood the importance of both the individual and the

community and place both in proper perspective within the larger scheme of human existence.

Chapter 1, East and West

Chapter 1, East and West Summary and Analysis

In this critical chapter, the author establishes her assessment of the unique and eternal achievements of fifth Century BCE Athenian culture. In this chapter, she also introduces several basic dichotomies that will prevail and define her understanding of the various writers and events of the period in the ensuing chapters.

Her assessment of the intellectual and cultural achievement of Athenian culture is clearly stated: "Something had awakened in the minds and spirits of the men there which was so to influence the world that the slow passage of long time, of century upon century and the shattering changes they brought, would be powerless to wear away that deep impress. Athens had entered upon her brief and magnificent flowering of genius which so molded the world of mind and of spirit that our mind and spirit to-day are different. . . . What was then produced of art and of thought has never been surpassed and very rarely equaled, and the stamp of it is upon all the art and all the thought of the Western world."

One of the basic themes of the book is immediately introduced - that the thought and the art of classical Athens "is full of meaning" for people of later generations. In particular, it is "full of meaning" for nations, cultures or societies beset by broad-scale and profound social and political change and the accompanying confusion and fear produced in the minds and souls of human beings. Why are the intellectual achievements of Athenian culture in the fifth century BCE so important? Because, Hamilton says, "it is ever to be borne in mind that though the outside of human life changes much, the inside changes little, and the lesson-book we cannot graduate from is human experience."

Indeed, throughout the history of human civilization people have struggled with the same questions, the same confusions, the same hopes and the same fears. The context in which profound change occurs will differ, but the struggles and questions of the human mind and heart remain consistent. New answers will be offered, to be sure, but Hamilton believes the core of meaningful answers to these recurrent philosophical and religious and life questions can always and uniquely be discovered in the literature and the art of this culture.

The first question Hamilton addresses is "What gave rise to such an unprecedented and unique achievement?" "What precipitated the maturing of a unique outlook upon life, the world, and the nature and importance of the individual?" To answer this question, she says, the reader must understand prevailing thought of the ancient world. Only then can the uniqueness of Athenian thought be appreciated. Part of this understanding rests upon recognition of the dichotomy between East and West in the thought and lifestyle of the ancient world.

All other societies in the ancient world, she says, reflected the same social and political structure: "a despot enthroned, whose whims and passions are the determining factor in the state; a wretched, subjugated populace; a great priestly organization to which is handed over the domain of the intellect." In these societies, intellect and reason played almost no role, particularly in the lives of the majority of the populace. Truth was determined, defined and handed down by rulers and priests. The people lived in fear and in perpetual struggle to survive. When they looked around, there was nothing to give them hope of a better or an easier life. People looked at the world around them and saw only more of the same strictly limited life and opportunity.

In a society that offers no hope of happiness or release from struggle and suffering, people quite naturally begin to place their hopes elsewhere. They respond to their condition by hoping for something that lies outside the conditions and constraints they cannot control or influence. Religion becomes some kind of hope for rescue from life. Religion responds by offering either internalization to a spiritual realm or an external hope of a better world and a better life beyond the pale of death.

In the East, people feared what they did not understand. Nature and the whims of their rulers offered many phenomena they did not understand. People were told to placate the forces of nature, perhaps even to anthropomorphize those forces and to pay homage to them in an effort to escape natural forces and their effects. Sacrifice, ritual, and propitiation of incomprehensible deities and natural forces were deemed the appropriate responses. Fear prevailed; and with it, the belief that if magic could not control these inconceivable forces, there would be something better beyond this life of suffering.

In sharp contrast, Athenian culture embraced this world, even in the face of struggle or fear. They embraced the power of the human intellect to make sense of the world and to discover meaning in present existence without deferring all hope beyond the grave. Indeed, these Athenians turned the power of the human intellect upon the world and the deepest struggles of life, analyzed it, and pondered it in a search for truth.

The East - Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and the rest of the known world - was characterized by societies in which the common people had no recourse, no opportunity, no escape from the whims and the control of the rulers and the priests who pointed them away from their misery to a brighter and better world of the spirit. Athens - the West - unshackled the human intellect and turned it upon present reality in order to bring people to an intellectual recognition that there is a common human condition that can be understood by the human mind and that can inform the human spirit and allow it to break free.

"That which distinguishes the modern world from the ancient, and that which divides the West from the East, is the supremacy of mind in the affairs of men, and this came to birth in Greece and lived in Greece alone of all the ancient world. The Greeks were the first intellectualists. In a world where the irrational had played a chief role, they came forward as the protagonists of the mind."

Chapter 2, Mind and Spirit

Chapter 2, Mind and Spirit Summary and Analysis

Mind and Spirit is the second dichotomy Hamilton emphasizes to explain the uniqueness of the Athenian cultural achievement in the ancient world. The particular achievement of Athenian life and thought was, for Hamilton, the ability to achieve perfect balance and integration of mind and spirit in human life. Perhaps it would be better to think of mind and spirit as antithetical and of the Athenian achievement as the discovery of the resolution of the antithesis.

What these Greeks discovered in the fifth century was recognition of beauty in the world and joy in life. Indeed, Hamilton points out, they were (as far as we know) the first people in the world to play. They discovered a new way to look at life and a new way to live. "To rejoice in life, to find the world beautiful and delightful to live in, was a mark of the Greek spirit which distinguished it from all that had gone before. It is a vital distinction. The joy of life is written upon everything the Greeks left behind."

To be sure, as their literature amply demonstrates, they knew sorrow and suffering. "The Greeks knew to the full how bitter life is as well as how sweet. Joy and sorrow, exultation and tragedy, stand hand in hand in Greek literature, but there is no contradiction involved thereby. Those who do not know the one do not really know the other either."

The Athenians looked at the world and the events around them with what moderns would call a "critical" eye. They examined everything. They analyzed everything. They questioned everything. With this view of life comes recognition of individuality and of the freedom of the individual from tyranny and from superstition. The idea of individual freedom to think, to decide and to act is recognized in this society. When individuals are free, they demand the right to think for themselves - another hallmark of this new understanding of life.

In sharp distinction to the Eastern point of view "ruled by the irrational, by dreadful unknown powers, where a man was utterly at the mercy of what he must not try to understand, the Greeks arose and the rule of reason began." Everything in their world was subjected to intellectual analysis and to reason.

The author points out some very interesting facts about ways in which the very language of the Greeks demonstrates a unique understanding of life. The English word for school is derived from the Greek word for leisure. For these intellectualists, leisure would logically be used for thinking, investigating, and learning about things. Philosophy, rather than an arcane and esoteric pursuit of abstract knowledge, in Greek referred to a "love" of knowledge and the effort to understand everything.

The life of the mind was vital to every Greek of every walk of life. One very important observation in this chapter will be echoed in a later discussion. This is the observation: "They could never leave anything obscure. Neither could they leave anything unrelated. System, order, connection, they were impelled to seek for. An unanalyzed whole was an impossible conception for them."

These Greeks were delighted by the life of the mind - by observation, investigation, reflection, and above all by discussion. Ideas and thoughts were discussed openly and honestly, anywhere and at any time. Indeed, conversation and discussion are the format chosen by Socrates to teach and by Plato to relate the teachings of Socrates. Such an intense and insatiable desire to know about everything must be discussed when people gathered.

This frame of mind also shaped the art of the period. Their statues were efforts to portray the perfect human, the perfect animal, the perfect true image. These Greeks might also be characterized as the first true realists. In all of the art of this period - literature, sculpture, and architecture - there is a new and unique realism that recognizes the profound beauty of the natural world and of the human form.

Again, Hamilton finds in the art of Greece the resolution of the antithesis between beauty and rationality and between mind and spirit. "The spiritual world was not to them another world from the natural world. It was the same world as that known to the mind. Beauty and rationality were both manifested in it.

Finally, Hamilton explains her analysis of how mind and spirit came into balance in the religion of these Athenians. Did they actually accept Homer's stories of the gods and goddesses at face value? They most certainly did not. Their reason and intellect enabled them to read the stories of Homer and penetrate the surface presentation to discern the essential truth beneath them. Hamilton finds this truth summarized by Socrates at the time when he was condemned to death: "Think this certain, that to a good man no evil can happen, either in life or in death." Again, Hamilton points to the essential core of Greek thinking: the control of emotion by reason and the achievement of balance between mind and spirit.

Chapter 3, The Way of the East and the Way of the West in Art

Chapter 3, The Way of the East and the Way of the West in Art Summary and Analysis

The art produced by a people reflects their outlook on life, their understanding of the world and how humans cope with the world, and their understanding of truth and ultimate reality. Again, the Eastern tendency toward spirituality and a non-worldly definition of meaning is placed against the Western rationality and acceptance of the natural world. In this chapter, Hamilton explains how art reflects the outlook of two very different points of view. "The spirit has not essentially anything to do with what is outside of itself. It is the mind that keeps hold of reality. The way of the spirit is by withdrawal from the world of objects to contemplation of the world within and there is no need of any correspondence between what does on without and what goes on within."

The art of the Greeks is characterized by realism, by proportion; the art of the East, on the other hand, moves away from realistic portrayal and correct proportion in order to represent symbolically ideas or realities not of this world. "In proportion as the spirit predominates, the real shapes and looks of things become unimportant and when the spirit is supreme, they are of no importance at all."

Surveying the artistic expression of various ancient civilizations, the author points repeatedly to how the lack of realism and proportion in the art produced by that civilization tends more and more to a particular type of symbolism that reflects the "spiritual" focus of the culture. Examinations of the characteristic forms and tendencies in the art of Egypt, India, and other "Eastern" cultures support her analysis. For example, the numerous arms, each holding some symbolic object, in Buddhist art demonstrate the tendency toward the spiritual.

"Symbols are always real things invested with unreality." Real things represent other things in some way. They can, therefore, be modified to serve the artist's purpose. This is not the case for the Athenians.

For the Athenians, however, art can never be inconsistent with what the mind knows to be true and what the eye perceives to be the true shape and proportion of nature. Once again, realism and proportion in Greek art bring out the theme of the dichotomies between east and west, between mind and spirit, and point forward to a uniquely Greek outcome of investigation and analysis of the world - that proportion is to be applied in life, as well as in art. This theme will be further developed in later chapters of the book.

The underlying purpose of Greek art was not to attempt to represent the beauty of another realm. Its purpose was to represent the beauty of the real world for the sake of beauty. Hamilton calls Greek art "plain art" that reflects the observation and reflection of

the intellect. It is simple, realistic and free of decoration. The beauty is perceived in the perfection of the form, not in decorations applied to it.

Greek architecture, says Hamilton, is the perfect expression of mind and spirit in balance. The structure of the architecture is pure, simple, unadorned, and proportioned both within its parts and in relation to its surroundings. Just as Greek sculpture results from careful study and observation of the form of the object and proportion and realism in replicating the image, Greek architecture results from studied proportion both in creating the building and in positioning the building in its appropriate place amid its surroundings.

Greek art, unlike the art of the East, resulted from the intellectual mastery of form and proportion. However, it also resulted from a spiritual ability to recognize beauty in the reality and perfection of the natural world.

Again, by exploiting the dichotomy between East and West and between mind and spirit, Hamilton elucidates the defining character of Greek artistic achievement. Again, by returning to the theme of balance and proportion, she demonstrates how the Athenians' unique worldview changed all civilizations to follow.

Chapter 4, The Greek Way of Writing

Chapter 4, The Greek Way of Writing Summary and Analysis

The reader will anticipate a discussion of the unique characteristics of the literature of fifth century Athens. This expectation is met in chapter four, although not necessarily in quite the way the reader anticipated. The previous discussion of the background and the achievements of Greek art pointed to forms of expression readily embraced, understood and copied by other cultures and later generations.

The accessibility of Greek artistic expression is, unfortunately, not available in the literature of the period. There are two primary reasons for this fact: first, very little of the literature of the period has survived, and, second, the nature of the Greek language makes it very difficult to translate the literature accurately or to read the literature in the original language without years of study and immersion.

Here the reader must trust Ms. Hamilton's knowledge of the language and her ability not only to translate the literature, but also to provide a window onto its unique forms and phrases, and onto its meter and rhythm by comparison to English writers. A widely respected classicist, Ms. Hamilton is certainly to be trusted in this regard.

The first thing to be recognized in the style of Greek literature is that it is as plain, succinct and direct as everything else they did. "Clarity and simplicity of statement, the watchwords of the thinker, were the Greek poets' watchwords too." This simplicity and directness in writing seems bare to modern English readers. Modern English readers are accustomed to elaborate and adorned description. In fact, among most modern English readers there is almost an equivalent appreciation of the thing described and the way it is described in words.

The Greeks did not necessarily turn completely from description and elaboration. "They saw the beauty of common things and were content with it." These Athenians were engaged in a constant quest to know the truth and to know it about everything. Truth will necessarily be expressed as fact. Truth needs no elaboration and it is most certainly not to be exaggerated. This was the Greek way of thinking and of writing. "The things men live with, noted as men of reason note them, not slurred over or evaded, not idealized away from actuality, and then perceived as beautiful - that is the way Greek poets saw the world."

By comparison of several thoughts expressed in the Hebrew writing style and in the Greek writing style, Hamilton brings readers to the understanding that the Greeks prized an economy of words, did not use repetition to create emotional effect, and strove to express themselves with the greatest simplicity.

Finally, also characteristic of the Greek writing style was the desire to inspire thought rather than replace it. The Athenian writers of the fifth century were not concerned to fully and completely describe every aspect of every truth. Rather they provided a glimpse - "the Greek poet lifts one corner of the curtain only" - that inspired the reader to consider, to imagine, and to discover truth for himself or herself.

Before discussing the most outstanding and definitive writers of the period, Hamilton compares the literature of Athens with writings well known to English-speaking readers to point up certain unique characteristics writing style that are to be grasped before dipping deeply into the literature itself.

The writers of fifth century Athens adopted a style that was characteristic of the temper of the day and reflected their intellectual preoccupations. This literature will be characterized by the economy of words, simplicity of expression, lack of adornment and elaboration, directness, and a desire to provoke thought and reflection rather than answer it.

Chapter 5, Pindar: The Last Greek Aristocrat

Chapter 5, Pindar: The Last Greek Aristocrat Summary and Analysis

This chapter is both an analysis of Pindar and an introduction to classical Greek poetry. The reader will instantly recall Hamilton's comments about the difficulty of reading Greek because of the amazing subtleties of the language. However, in this chapter, the reader is able to gain an understanding of how Greek poetry works.

With the caveat that Pindar is the most difficult to read and certainly the most difficult to translate of all the Athenian poets, Hamilton explains the beauty and perfection of Pindar's poetry through comparison with carefully selected English poets.

First, Pindar's poetry is characterized as "most like music" - but she is comparing it specifically to the kind of music that is carefully structured around attention to movement, symmetry and balance. She compares it to a Bach fugue or a Beethoven sonata. Pindar's poetry then is carefully structured to produce certain effects.

Second, meter was vital to the construction of Greek poetry. "They would have in their poetry balanced measure answering measure, cunningly sought correspondence of meaning and rhythm; they loved a great sweep of varied movement, swift and powerful, yet at the same time absolutely controlled."

Third, the modern reader must understand that the sound of the words was as important in Greek poetry as their meaning. In many ancient languages, just as the shape of written letters and words often carried an image of the words represented, the sound of the words given to ideas and objects needed to also match the meaning of the words. Contemporary English does not intentionally attend to the sound of words as much as to the meaning of the words.

These three characteristics - structure, meter, and the sound of the words - gave the poetry of classical Athens a musical character that imprinted itself upon the mind of the reader or hearer. It is not merely the thoughts or ideas, but the specific expression of the thoughts that remains with the reader.

In turning to the thoughts and ideas conveyed in Pindar's poetry, Hamilton begins by calling the reader to understand the poet's social and historical position and the goal of his writing. "Pindar is the last spokesman for the Greek aristocracy and the greatest after Homer. The aristocratic ideal, so powerful in shaping the Greek genius, is shown best of all in his poetry."

Pindar's words are the last gasp of a dying political and social order in a time of overwhelming intellectual change. The labor pains of the first democracy were sounding the death knell for the aristocracy. Pindar was its last proponent. Thus, to understand Pindar's poetry, the reader must first understand the ideal he defended: the aristocratic creed.

"In the aristocratic creed, power was to be held by men who alone were immune to the temptations that beset, on the one hand, those struggling to be powerful and, on the other, those struggling to survive. The proper leaders of the world, the only ones who could be trusted to guide it disinterestedly, were a class from generation to generation raised above the common level. This didn't occur by self-seeking ambition, but by birth. This was a class that a great tradition and a careful training made superior to the selfish greed and the servile meanness other men were subject to. As a class, they were men of property, but position was not dependent upon wealth. The blood ran as blue in the veins of the poor noble as in the rich, and precedence was never a mere matter of money. Thus, absolutely sure and secure, free from the anxious personal preoccupations which distract men at large, they could see clearly on the lofty eminence they were born to, what those lower down could not catch a glimpse of, and they could direct mankind along the way it should go."

The aristocratic class, to be sure, exercised exceptional power and influence. They clearly enjoyed a privileged existence. Yet they were fully aware of great responsibility. With this nobility by bloodline came the requirement of a point of view and a lifestyle worthy of the privilege. The elements of the aristocratic code were:

1 Honesty

2 Reliability

3 Never taking advantage of another

4 Perfect courage

5 Perfect courtesy (even to enemies)

6 Magnificence in life

7 Liberality of means

8 Pride in embodying the code

History has amply demonstrated that aristocrats have always failed to embody the ideal and to achieve a life that reflects the code. Pindar did not have the same panoramic view of history, and continued to believe the ideal could be achieved. He believed the aristocracy could use its privilege for the good of others. Pindar's writings are the last defense of class-consciousness in Greece.

Pindar's poems all honor some noble hero - often a victor in the games. The poems lift up the noble character of the hero or victor, not the details of his victory. These heroes were presented as men who admirably upheld the tradition and the code of the aristocracy. The poems also include the story of a great noble hero of the past. The purpose of this structure is to demonstrate that the nobility of the heroes of the past is still alive in the young heroes of the day. In this, Pindar believes the future can be safeguarded.

Pindar knows, however, that he is the last of a dying breed. This injects a tone of sadness in his poetry. He believes there is nothing better to replace the aristocracy, so it is best to dwell upon the past and the present. Pindar's lasting importance in history is to be found in the beauty and perfection of his poetry and in his last defense of an unachievable ideal.

Chapter 6, The Athenians as Plato Saw Them

Chapter 6, The Athenians as Plato Saw Them Summary and Analysis

Plato's writings might be understood to open a window upon the intellectual life and values of Athenian society. Civilization, for them, "is a matter of imponderables, of delight in the things of the mind, of love of beauty, of honor, grace, courtesy, delicate feeling. Where imponderables are things of first importance, there is the height of civilization, and if, at the same time, the power to act exists unimpaired, human life has reached a level seldom attained and very seldom surpassed."

Of primary importance to the fifth century, Athenians were the imponderables. These imponderables were the truths and the ideals upon which the world and all matters of life could be understood and ordered. Order was of the utmost importance to these Athenians. They must search out and know the order of the world around them in order to understand their place and role within the whole. The values of the society and the individual must reflect this understanding and inspire societies and individuals to perfection and beauty in living.

These values and structures in the world and in the society included:

- Realism. Above all else, these Greeks were realists. They did not evade uncomfortable facts, they did not disguise them, and they did not elaborate upon them.

- Simplicity. In a society in which truth is to be sought and valued above all else, the simple, unadorned truth is all that is necessary. Truth, simply and clearly presented, is sufficient.

- Courage. Uncomfortable truths and undesirable situations (such as Sparta's attack) were not to be escaped or evaded. They were to be met head-on with courage.

- Honesty. When truth is the highest value, honesty must also be cherished. The quest for truth, the realism, and the courage of the Greeks allowed no dishonesty.

Plato, concerned as he is with the ideals, nevertheless shows the reader Athenian society. "This society he introduces us to is eminently civilized, of men delighting to use their minds, loving beauty and elegance, as Pericles says in the funeral oration, keenly alive to all the amenities of life, and, above all, ever ready for a talk on no matter how abstract and abstruse a subject."

It is very significant that Plato preferred the form of dialogues in his writings. It is consistent with the lifestyle of the time for people to simply take time out to discuss

serious matters. It is also significant in another way that is indicative of the mindset of the Athenians of the fifth century. The most important thing to grasp about the dialogues is that neither Plato nor Socrates (his prototypical philosopher) ever handed out answers or "taught" as the term is generally used in English.

Teaching - giving answers to questions - would, in the thinking of the thought leaders of fifth-century Athens, deny an audience the inherent human right to search for and discover truth for himself. A critical hallmark of Athenian intellectualism was the belief that every person was free to think and believe as he thought correct and appropriate. Each individual must seek out and discover his own truth.

The dialogues do not offer answers. Instead, they lead people in redirecting or refining their questions and investigations in ways that will help them discover answers. "Such a conclusion or rather absence of conclusion, illustrates the attitude peculiar to Socrates among all the great teachers of the world. He will not do their thinking for the men who come to him, neither in matters small or great."

The lasting gift of Plato was the definition and example of the "Socratic method" of questioning, investigating, and seeking truth. Plato's dialogues also demonstrate the pervasive intellectualism of fifth-century Athens and the determination of the people to engage in their own quest for truth rather than settle for the answers of others.

Chapter 7, Aristophanes and the Old Comedy

Chapter 7, Aristophanes and the Old Comedy Summary and Analysis

Before actually turning to the writings of Aristophanes, the modern reader should, says Hamilton, understand the character of the comedy of the period. Her description is quite apt. Indeed, her quotation of Voltaire is very much to the point, "True comedy is the speaking picture of the Follies and Foibles of a Nation." For a 21st century reader, the words that leap to mind to describe this type of comedy are "lampooning," and "roasting." No individual, no group, no aspect of life, and no idea were exempt from comedic analysis. Moreover, as in the case of a roast, it was quite likely that the individual subjected to ridicule or caricature was present when the comedy was performed.

Athenian society cherished and embraced both tragic drama and outrageous comedy. Aristophanes began writing his comedies as Greek drama was beginning to decline. Little has survived—only eleven plays by Aristophanes and none by his contemporaries.

As wildly unstructured as these plays seem, as bawdy the humor, and as in touch with the questions and concerns of the day, these comedies actually presupposed an audience that was both educated and well informed in current activities and events in the society. There are satirical attacks on the intellectualism exemplified by Plato and there are parodies of scenes from the popular tragic dramas. Always, however, the singular purpose of comedy in classical Athens was fun.

What gave these comedies eternal timeliness was that Aristophanes poked fun at the deeper, underlying aspects of human nature and society that recur in almost every time and place. To be sure, political, social and philosophical leaders of the day were singled out by name. However, the ridicule was aimed at the underlying values and beliefs or at the essential human characteristics that gave rise to their momentary expression.

The tendency of individuals with an inflated sense of self-importance to mask empty thoughts in grand and eloquent expression, for example, is timeless. This was a particular target for Aristophanes. This single exemplar of Old Comedy allows us to glimpse a society that was determined to find order and meaning in the world, individuals determined to know and accept their place within the context of the whole society, and yet human beings in every moment of life. This Old Comedy demonstrates the ability of these lofty-minded Athenians to stop and hold a mirror to their lives and find in their own striving, the subject of fun. It demonstrates their abundant love of life and their joy in living.

Chapter 8, Herodotus: The First Sight-Seer

Chapter 8, Herodotus: The First Sight-Seer Summary and Analysis

Understanding Herodotus fully requires the reader to understand the context within which he explored and reported on the world and in which he addressed the compelling issues of his day. "Herodotus is the historian of the glorious fight for liberty in which the Greeks conquered the overwhelming power of Persia. They won the victory because they were free men defending their freedom against a tyrant and his army of slaves. So Herodotus saw the contest. The watchword was freedom; the stake was the independence or the enslavement of Greece; the issue made it sure that Greeks never would be slaves."

To the 21st century mind, the mere idea of one individual owning another human being as a slave is completely abhorrent. To the Athenians of the fifth century BCE, however, slavery was an accepted fact of life. Their lifestyle depended upon slaves, as did their economy. Indeed, slavery had always been a fact of life.

The first writer to seriously scrutinize and condemn slavery was Euripides. He was the first to give expression to a sentiment that was slowly and quietly (with very notable exceptions) forming in Greek consciousness. In fact, the question did not fully surface until Aristotle's time.

The prevailing attitude toward slavery was that it was good common sense and socially convenient. It was not formally denounced until the Stoic philosophers gained prominence. To the Athenians, there was no contradiction in men who owned slaves and thought of them as machines that breathe fiercely defending human freedom.

Quite typically for a man of his time, Herodotus questioned everything. He "wondered" about everything: how people lived in other societies, what the world was like in other places. Herodotus set a goal to travel throughout the world. Hamilton correctly calls him "the first sight-seer in the world." However, it is important to note the author's point that Herodotus was not just amusing himself with these arduous travels. His intention was to learn everything he could about everything in the world.

Herodotus' journeys, explorations and observations were part of a quest that affected every Athenian of his day: the quest to discover Truth. All previous beliefs and judgments must be laid aside in the face of observed fact - of Truth. In addition, in his quest Herodotus was almost uniquely objective and unbiased.

Herodotus is generally considered the "first historian" and he was the first person to use the word "history" in the sense that has continued to today. Nevertheless, it is important

to understand that for Herodotus writing history is not a cold recital of dates and facts. The Greek word for "history" in fact means investigation. In his day, his time, there was a seemingly unlimited world to investigate. The modern reader, however, must also bear in mind that "no borderline had yet been drawn between the credible and the incredible." His sense of the limits of credibility was not the same as those of modern readers, particularly when he investigated something totally new to him.

Hamilton is quick to remind her readers just how often historians forget that the subject of history is people. Herodotus never forgot. His investigations always probe beyond mere events and facts in an effort to uncover the underlying causes of human action and its results. When he reports the events at Marathon and Thermopylae and Salamis, "The disposing causes are men's arrogance and greed for conquest and their power to defend what is dear to them against overwhelming odds."

His investigations of the known world eventually and inevitably attempt to answer the question whether freedom or tyranny will prevail in human society. Emerging in his investigations is the seed of recognition of the intrinsic value of each individual. He concludes that a major cause of the fall and destruction of Persia at the hands of the small band of Athenians is that the arrogance of the Persians was a result of their ability to gain too much power and to become too self-assured in that power.

In the writings of Herodotus, Hamilton finds the emergence of history as a "discipline" of investigation into the actions, affairs and attitudes of human beings. In these investigations of human beings, Herodotus claimed the proof that accumulation of power leads to arrogance and that arrogance will eventually lead to the loss of power and the destruction of the powerful.

Although the Athenian victory over Persia is characterized as the defeat of tyranny by the determination of a free society to remain free, Herodotus investigates and identifies key elements of human nature that create a repeatable chain of cause and effect. Further, Herodotus gives voice to the value of the individual and the limits it places upon the exercise of power by others.

Chapter 9, Thucydides: The Thing That Hath Been Is That Which Shall Be

Chapter 9, Thucydides: The Thing That Hath Been Is That Which Shall Be Summary and Analysis

Thucydides was one of the Athenian generals during the first part of the Peloponnesian War. By the time the war ended, he was able to adopt the role of objective observer and write an account of events. His history of the war is the classic study. However, the modern reader must approach it with an appreciation of the Greek mindset from which Thucydides observed and wrote.

"The modern scientific historian looks at his subject very much as the geologist does. History is a chronicle of fact considered for itself alone. There is no pattern in the web unrolled from the loom of time and no profit in studying it except to gain information. That was not the point of view of the Greek historian of the war between Athens and Sparta. . . ." The Athenians were not interested in knowing facts for the mere purpose of knowing facts. Knowledge of facts was desirable because it revealed past errors and misunderstandings and because properly understood it could help readers live and act better.

"Thucydides wrote his book because he believed that men would profit from knowledge of what brought about that ruinous struggle precisely as they profit from a statement of what causes a deadly disease. He reasoned that since the nature of the human mind does not change any more than the nature of the human body, circumstances swayed by human nature are bound to repeat themselves, and in the same situation men are bound to act in the same way unless it is shown to them that such a course in other days ended disastrously. When the reason why a disaster came about is perceived people will be able to guard against that particular danger."

Thucydides believed he was capable of writing as a "coldly impartial" observer of the war. "He saw his subject in its eternal aspect." As he investigated and reported on the events and the causes of this war between two Greek city-states, he believed he had grasped a universal truth. The purpose of his history is thus twofold: first, to tell the story of this particular war, but, more important, second, to show "what war is, why it comes to pass, what it does, and, unless men learn better ways, must continue to do. The movement of time and the flow of history were, for Thucydides, a spinning ball. Unless humans learn to act differently, the same situations and the same responses will come around again just as surely as the ball spins.

Thucydides extrapolated from the precipitating factors and the root causes of the Peloponnesian war the deeper human flaw that he believed to be the cause of all war. That cause, he believed, was greed. This is not a greed for a few things, but a deeply

rooted and pervasive greed that Hamilton characterizes "that strange passion for power and possession which no power and no possession satisfy."

Thucydides proposed that the war between Athens and Sparta had nothing to do with differences, but rather with a crucial similarity: power. Both Athens and Sparta had power and they were - using his word - compelled to strive for more power. He says that human history is like a spinning ball. Excess of power keeps revolving in a cycle. His idea is nothing less than the germ of the idea that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

For Thucydides this spinning ball began with the earliest despotic rulers. The more power they got, the more power they wanted. They became more abusive in exercising their power and authority until opposition began to arise and come together. When enough people decided to stop the abuse of power, they came together and defeated the despot. In time, this new group began to grasp at more and more power and the cycle is repeated.

Thucydides believed that the destruction and the terrible results of the Peloponnesian War were so devastating that later generations could only read about them in horror and learn the lesson that great power brings about its own destruction. He believed his account of this war would make the world understand for all time that "power worked out in evil and that greed was its source and its strength."

Only a few years later, when Athens was forced to defend itself against Persia, the surprising Athenian victory was interpreted by the people as divine justice. A confederation of states was formed in the aftermath of the war with Athens chosen as its leader. Athens became powerful and the consciousness of power bred arrogance. Athens began to subject the members of the confederacy to Athenian rule, quickly becoming the tyranny of the ancient world.

Although Aeschylus and Euripides also saw what was happening and challenged the corruption of the city's morality, "Thucydides saw that the foundation stone of all morality, the regard for the rights of others, had crumbled and fallen away. . . . In the big business of power politics, it was not only necessary, it was right, for the state to seize every opportunity for self advantage. Thucydides was the first probably to see, certainly to put into words, this new doctrine which was to become the avowed doctrine of the world. He makes Pericles explicitly deny that fair dealing and compassion are proper to the state as they are to the individual. A country pursuing her own way with no thought of imposing that way on others might, he points out, keep to such ideas, but not one bent upon dominion. 'A city that rules an empire,' he writes, 'holds nothing which is to its own interest as contrary to right and reason.'"

The original ideal of the Athenian state was that the individual must accept responsibility for the state. The Athenian state was designed to be a union of individuals who were free to live as they wished and to follow their own ideas and who were expected to be obedient only to laws they wrote and enacted for themselves. Yet the freedom of the

individual within this state was, like everything else in this culture, to be limited and controlled by reason.

The "climax" of Thucydides' historical investigation is a vivid picture of the crumbling of a grand society. Thucydides does this by showing readers what happened to the individual Athenians during the wars. Power, he says, gave rise to vice, and vice gave way to distorted thinking. Nobility died; distrust arose; the grasping for power and more power destroyed a civilization.

Chapter 10, Xenophon: The Ordinary Athenian Gentleman

Chapter 10, Xenophon: The Ordinary Athenian Gentleman Summary and Analysis

Xenophon, although a somewhat younger contemporary of Thucydides, also experienced the war and the destruction of Athens. His writing, however, seems to come from an entirely different world. Xenophon is not concerned with the roots and causes of war or with philosophical reflection upon its effects. Rather he records a snapshot of life in "a cheerful place with many nice people in it and many agreeable ways of passing the time."

Xenophon records the events and conversations of a dinner party hosted and attended by ordinary people. The exceptions to the group of ordinary people were Xenophon and Socrates. It is an account of a relaxing and enjoyable event. At the beginning of the account of the party, Xenophon says he decided to write it because he thought it important to know how honorable and virtuous people spend their time.

Xenophon wrote a number of books on a wide variety of topics, some of which provide a rare glimpse of the life of the women of ancient Greece. His portrait of Socrates is of a friendly man who was as comfortable with jokes and lighthearted fun as he was with contemplation of eternal truth. Most of the conversations with Socrates recorded in his writings are focused on practical advice about the living on one's daily life and managing one's affairs.

Some of the more profound thoughts in his writing include:

- The belief that peace should be the goal of all governments

- The belief that diplomacy is the appropriate way to settle differences, not war

- The only way to conquer a country is through generosity.

Hamilton concerns herself in the remainder of the chapter with the "Anabasis" or "Retreat of the Ten Thousand" which she considers Xenophon's best book. It is, she says, the book he really lives by. She says it is "a great story, and of great importance for our knowledge of the Greeks. No other piece of writing gives so clear a picture of Greek individualism, that instinct which was supremely characteristic of ancient Greece and decided the course of the Greek achievement."

Greek individualism is, of course, the basis of the Greeks' passionate love of freedom. Each individual was to be free to live life as he/she saw fit; to make his/her own decisions and to think independently. Greeks depended upon their own sense of

morality and their own understanding of truth. Only this attitude could give birth to democracy. The essence of democracy is the belief that the average person can be relied upon to use good sense, accepted morality, and strength of character to do the right thing. "Trust the individual was the avowed doctrine in Athens, and expressed or unexpressed it was common to Greece."

The point of the story of the Ten Thousand is that they survived and returned home safely only because they were a group of intelligent, thinking individuals who were able to voluntarily work together to find creative solutions to problems.

The "Anabasis" contains some seminal thoughts that have come down through the generations, though most people who know the thoughts today do not know their source:

"The leader must himself believe that willing obedience always beats forced obedience, and that he can get this only by really knowing what should be done. Thus he can secure obedience from his men because he can convince them that he knows best, precisely as a good doctor makes his patients obey him. Also he must be ready to suffer more hardships than he asks of his soldiers, more fatigue, greater extremes of heat and cold."

Hamilton (correctly) finds in the "Anabasis" the story of Athens told as the story of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand. It is the story of respect for individuality and voluntary cooperation for the common good.

Chapter 11, The Idea of Tragedy

Chapter 11, The Idea of Tragedy Summary and Analysis

Hamilton's view is that history has given the world only four great writers of tragic drama: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Shakespeare. "Tragedy is an achievement peculiarly Greek. They were the first to perceive it and they lifted it to its supreme height. . . . it concerns the entire people . . . who felt the appeal of the tragic to such a degree that they would gather thirty thousand strong to see a performance. In tragedy the Greek genius penetrated farthest and it is the revelation of what was most profound in them."

The unique flowering of intellectual life in fifth century Athens could be the only source of tragic drama. As people examined and reflected upon human life they perceived "more and more clearly that it was bound up with evil and that injustice was the nature of things." Tragedy was the result of a poet's ability to see beauty in the struggle with the truth about human life - that something is wrong that cannot be repaired.

What is tragedy? It is, says Hamilton, pain transformed into exaltation; it is the ability to give pleasure by presenting pain truthfully. Tragic pain is different from all other kinds of pain. "Pity, awe, reconciliation, exaltation - these are the elements that make up tragic pleasure. No play is a tragedy that does not call them forth."

Tragedy is created when the importance and the dignity of human life confront profound pain and suffering. Tragedy is not to be found in indifference to pain or in the ability to turn a blind eye to human suffering. "Tragedy's one essential is a soul that can feel greatly." Tragedy is not necessarily tied to undeserved suffering; it is tied to the ability of the individual to experience rare and exceptional pain and suffering. It is "the authentic voice of human agony in a struggle past the power of the human heart to bear." Tragedy offers a glimpse into an exceptional reality most people will never experience in this life.

Chapter 12, Aeschylus: The First Dramatist

Chapter 12, Aeschylus: The First Dramatist Summary and Analysis

Aeschylus was the first dramatist and the creator of tragic drama. He is said to have written ninety plays, but only seven have survived. In the time immediately following the Athenian defeat of Persia, Aeschylus reflected the mood of his time. It was a time when human insight was heightened. "A victory achieved past all hope at the very moment when utter defeat and the loss of all things seemed certain had lifted them to an exultant courage. . . . This was the moment for the birth of tragedy, that mysterious combination of pain and exaltation, which discloses an invincible spirit precisely when disaster is irreparable."

In this time of heightened awareness and profound analysis of the human condition, Aeschylus confronted "the bewildering strangeness of life." Most specifically, he saw and investigated the mystery of suffering. "Mankind he saw fast bound to calamity by the working of unknown powers, committed to a strange venture, companioned by disaster. But to the heroic, desperate odds fling a challenge. The high spirit of his time was strong in Aeschylus."

The poet's sensibility joined this understanding of human anguish to create tragedy. "And if," says Hamilton, "tragedy's peculiar province is to show man's misery at its blackest and man's grandeur at its greatest, Aeschylus is not only the creator of tragedy, he is the most truly tragic of all the tragedians." His characters are never resigned to suffering, nor do they accept pain passively. His heroes meet disaster head-on with courage and nobility.

Contrary to most popular opinion, Hamilton argues that Aeschylus was not in essence a philosopher who wandered onto the theatrical stage. Rather, she says, he invented the dramatic form in order to give expression to what he saw of human life. His addition of a second actor to the play created the context in which characters could interact.

As Euripides might be characterized as the ultimate rationalist, Aeschylus was essentially and profoundly religious. But he was a religious radical who cast off the external trappings of religion to grasp its living heart. "In Him, in God, he holds, rests the final and reconciling truth of this mystery that is human life, which is above all the mystery of undeserved suffering." His questions are timeless: How is it possible for God to be just and allow the innocent to suffer? He introduces human sin to remove injustice from God. And he embraced the idea of the inheritance of sin from one generation to another, so that the sins of the parents are visited upon the children.

His answer to the question of how a just God permits the suffering of the innocent is quite typical for a Greek of the fifth century. He concluded that the purpose and value of human pain and error was that it led humanity to greater and more profound knowledge. In Aeschylus' own words "God, whose law it is that he who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despite, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God."

Aeschylus offered this profound understanding of human suffering in the stories of a wife driven to murder her husband, and of a son driven to kill his mother. And from those stories he derives his answer to the profound question of humanity in all times and places: suffering results from sin and error, it is to be endured, perhaps even embraced, because its result is knowledge.

Chapter 13, Sophocles: Quintessence of the Greek

Chapter 13, Sophocles: Quintessence of the Greek Summary and Analysis

About twenty years after Aeschylus wrote his tragedies, Sophocles began to write tragedy for a new day in Athens. For Sophocles, suffering and pain and struggle were not just to be endured with courage. Rather they were to be actively embraced and accepted. Passive endurance is not encompassed in Sophocles' point of view. "To strive to understand the irresistible movement of events is illusory; still more so to set ourselves against what we can affect as little as the planets in their orbits. Even so, we are not mere spectators. There is nobility in the world, goodness, gentleness. Men are helpless so far as their fate is concerned, but they can ally themselves with the good, and in suffering and dying, die and suffer nobly."

During the twenty years that separated Aeschylus and Sophocles Athens had used her victory over Persia to increase her power and her imperial control over other states and had become a tyrant. All of the other cities in Greece had turned against Athens and Sparta was poised to deliver destruction.

Sophocles takes a vitally important step in thinking about suffering. He distinguishes between what is outside the person from what is inside. He actually sounds much like a precursor of Stoicism when he says that humans have no control over the events of the world. Humans may have no control over what happens to them. What they can control is how they face it, how they cope with it, how they remain calm and strong within. "Within himself, he held, no man is helpless." He has Ajax say that persons can live nobly or die nobly. His belief that fate cannot be altered leads to the conclusion that persons have no hope of changing their circumstances. Rather than struggling to turn aside the tide of inevitability, one should recognize that fate is at work. One should then embrace the situation, face it with strength and courage, and endure and rise victorious over it by ordering and controlling one's handling of the outcome.

Sophocles' Antigone says:

Unwept, unfriended, without marriage song,

I pass on my last journey to my grave.

Behold me, what I suffer and from whom,

because I have upheld that which is high.

Sophocles reflected his social and intellectual context in seeking order in human life and in the external world. He wrote of "law" - laws that structure human action and provide constraints and controls, harmony and order. In many ways both his truths and his style are quintessentially Greek: directness, simplicity, reasonableness, clarity, restraint, structure and proportion. He is a distant and detached observer.

His plays approach technical perfection, and his poetic phrasing is unsurpassed. Although Sophocles achieved unparalleled technical and stylistic greatness in his plays, his detachment limited the full dramatic effect the reader finds in Aeschylus.

Chapter 14, Euripides: The Modern Mind

Chapter 14, Euripides: The Modern Mind Summary and Analysis

Hamilton characterizes Euripides as the "great exponent of the ever recurring modern mind." She says his plays are too sad to be truly tragic. Yet Euripides has spoken for more than 2000 years to the deepest pain and sorrow of the human experience. Euripides is, she says, "the poet of the world's grief."

What Euripides offers is less a noble endurance of suffering and less an effort to gain knowledge from patient suffering and more a profound sympathy with suffering. This sympathy is new in Greek literature. It is accompanied by something else that is new - a conviction and a defense of the worth of every human being. These two characteristics are what Hamilton believes expresses the modern mind.

The modern mind is not necessarily the mind of the twentieth century, so much as it is the mind "who will not leave us to walk undisturbed in the ways of our fathers. The established order is always wrong to them. This modern mind resurfaces, she says, throughout history when the social order demands that some soul arise to speak against "the giant agony of the world."

"Above all, they care for human life and human things and can never stand aloof from them. They suffer for mankind, and what preoccupies them is the problem of pain." The modern-minded cannot silently observe suffering and pain or separate themselves from it. They see injustice and its effects upon human life and their inability to step outside that pain drives them to revolt. "In their pursuit of justice at any cost they tear away veils that hide hateful things; they call into question all pleasant and comfortable things."

But despair is neither within their ability or their vocabulary. "They are rebels, fighters. They will never accept defeat. It is this fact that gives them their profound influence, the fact that they who see so deep into the wrong and misery and feel them so intolerable, never conclude the defeat of the mind of man."

Only a poet, says Hamilton, who can so completely step inside the pain of others could have written the "Trojan Women." Viewing war from the perspective of the women taken captive and waiting to be taken to everything slavery means for them. This was a sharp critique of the tyranny Athens was adopting; it was a critique of human indifference. His answer was to confront the people of Athens with the truth he saw and challenge their fear and hardness. By taking them to the depths of suffering and pain he hoped to restore in them the compassion for others that was disappearing.

Even the popular religion of the day came under sharp criticism from Euripides because of the immorality and indifference of the gods. He concluded that a god that is unjust is not truly a god.

Hamilton concludes, "what men remembered and came to him for was the pitying understanding of their own suffering selves in a strange world of pain, and the courage to tear down old wrongs and never give up seeking for new things that should be good." This is a reminder to twenty-first century readers that the modern mind is a very old and venerable thing. What it perceives as the root and cause of human pain and suffering will be confronted and exposed for what it truly is. Only when facades are stripped away and the truth is shown can the new thing that is good be brought to life.

Chapter 15, The Religion of the Greeks

Chapter 15, The Religion of the Greeks Summary and Analysis

If the reader is to understand the Greek mind and the essence of Athenian thought, the reader must come to an understanding of Greek religion. Many have read Homer and Hesiod and the writings of fifth century Greece and come away with merely a picture of a religion populated with gods and goddesses who are very human in their flaws and foibles. Indeed, many have concluded that the religion of ancient Greece was not worth serious consideration. "The reason people think if it in this way," says Hamilton, "is that Greek religion has got confused with Greek mythology."

Greek mythology is not Greek religion. The essence of Greek religion in the fifth century is not about placating a divine pantheon conceived in the image of humanity. What, then, are the characteristics of this religion? These are the main characteristics Hamilton wants the reader to grasp:

1 No group or priesthood sacrifices people to achieve an end; yet each individual is willing to sacrifice him/her-self for the end of working for the good of others

2 It was developed by poets and artists and philosophers

3 It had no sacred scriptures, no creed and no dogmas

4 The Greeks never tried to define it. They understood only that the invisible must be expressed by the visible.

5 There was a dominating ideal which the Greeks believed everyone would want to pursue once they saw it

6 This ideal has been translated a "the good" or, in Hamilton's case, "excellence." It refers to the greatest or highest possible perfection; the very best a person could aim for; it demanded the very best a person could give.

7 It excludes magic; it does not recognize dreadful powers in the world that must be appeased by various rites and practices

8 It seeks out and appreciates the beauty in the world because it sees the world to be rational

9 The greatest of the gods no longer support only the powerful few, but they have become the protectors of the poor and helpless

The elevation of Dionysus, the god of wine, in the sixth century, was the god who could free people from themselves and reveal to them that they too could become divine. In

complete opposition to Apollo and the Delphic Oracle, which represented moderation and self control, rationality and the quest for truth, came the worship of Dionysus which was characterized by enjoying everything to greatest excess.

In time these two opposites were brought together by the prevailing Greek rationality when Orpheus (Apollo's pupil) reformed the rituals and brought order. In time Dionysus was admitted to the Eleusinian mysteries and took a place beside Demeter, the goddess of the corn. Little is known about the Eleusinian mysteries. They were shrouded in great secrecy. "All we are sure of is that they awakened a deep sense of reverence and awe, that they offered purification from sin, and that they promised immortality."

By the fifth century, the theater gave expression to the union of the mysteries and the rational religion of the Delphic oracle. "There the great mystery, human life, was presented through the power of great art. They were gathered there in an act of worship, all sharing in the same experience. The poet and the actors did not speak to the audience; they spoke for them. Their task and their power was to interpret and express the great communal emotion."

While it is true that relatively little is known about the Eleusinian mysteries, a great deal is known about the mystery religions practiced a few centuries later. The rites and beliefs of the later mysteries were distinctly "irrational" in Hamilton's terms. How much of that can actually be read back into the Eleusinian mysteries is debatable. But it is possible that Hamilton's dichotomy of mind and spirit and of east and west might not hold up entirely in this matter.

Hamilton sees in the shared experience of the Greek theater the creation of the kind of community that can lift people out of despair and isolation. "The religion of the mysteries was individual, the search for personal purity and salvation. It pointed men toward union with God. The religion of the drama brought men into union with one another."

The cataclysmic upheaval of the Peloponnesian War changed religion in Athens, just as it changed everything else about daily life. People became more concerned about survival in an uncertain world than about salvation. Religion changed, as the forms of religion often do in order to remain relevant. The voice that spoke to the needs of the people of the fifth century was a voice of reason, a voice that called them back to the pursuit and the contemplation of "the good," of "excellence." That voice was Socrates, a voice that spoke in its on tenor until silenced and then spoke on through the dialogues recorded by his student, Plato.

Socrates and Socrates as shaped by Plato restored and refined the idea and the ideal of "the good" that was the guide of the classical world and that still informs human thought and reflection today.

For Socrates there were two "fundamental realities" - the good and truth. Socrates believed and taught that every human could attain these realities, and that every human would strive to attain them once they were seen. Socrates believed his personal mission

was to help people recognize their ignorance and lead them to where they could begin to glimpse the truth and the good that lay beyond the confusion, pain and apparent futility of life. He was convinced, however, that it would be both inappropriate and wrong for him to try to hand over truth to them. Each person must seek the good and seek to discover truth for him-/her-self.

Rather than lecturing and teaching, Socrates asked questions designed to topple the prevailing conventions and beliefs of the day. His purpose was to stimulate them to search for their own truth and then to live by that truth. Hamilton says, "the world took courage from him and from the conviction which underlay all he said and did, that in the confusion and darkness and seeming futility of life there is a purpose which is good and that men can find and help work it out.

Chapter 16, The Way of the Greeks

Chapter 16, The Way of the Greeks Summary and Analysis

The poets, dramatists, religionists and philosophers of the fifth century were shaping the mind of a people, the ethos of a society. They called the Athenians to be reflective, inquisitive, and persistent seekers of truth and embodiments of "the good." In the twenty-first century, we might call it "character." Character is, in fact, a Greek word. But its meaning in the fifth century was slightly different from the meaning ascribed to the English word today.

"To us a man's character is that which is peculiarly his own; it distinguishes each one from the rest. The Greeks, on the contrary, thought what was important in a man were precisely the qualities he shared with all mankind." The Greeks saw everything as part of the larger whole. This is an essential characteristic of the Athenian mind.

To see something as part of a larger whole is to see it in a different perspective. Just as perspective defined Greek art, it defined their thinking about human existence in the world. Seen from the perspective of the whole world, an individual cannot be viewed as the defining factor of the whole. There is something greater than the individual in the whole. Thus Hamilton can conclude, "To see anything in relation to other things is to see it simplified."

Twenty-first century thought views human nature as "the great enigma" and the central conflict in life occurs within the individual. "We differ from the Greeks in nothing so much as in the way we look at the individual, isolated, in and for himself." The Greeks, however, focused on the enigma of the conflict between humanity and the forces and facts that define it and shape it. The Greeks asked questions about the experiences and the struggles that make all human life the same.

To return to Hamilton's dichotomy, the struggles of the individual and the individual response to them are the isolated specifics that are the concern of the spirit. The mind draws abstractions from life and classifies them into types. There are two questions for humanity: what things are and what things mean. The Greeks were concerned with both questions. Balance requires answers to both questions. The Greeks looked at individuals and extracted from their experiences eternal and universal truths. They saw all of humanity in a single individual. As beautiful as the individual might be, the whole of humanity was greater and more beautiful than the individual. The individual achieved dignity as part of the whole.

Chapter 17, The Way of the Modern World

Chapter 17, The Way of the Modern World Summary and Analysis

Hamilton believes that it has been only in rare and brief moments that the balance of mind and spirit achieved by the fifth century Athenians has occurred in later human history. After the end of the Greek city-state the world moved through various periods of peril and transition. And as always they responded with fear, confusion and insecurity. They turned, she says, away from the visible world - away from the world of the mind - to the world of the spirit and followed various paths they believed offered rescue from the sorrow and misery of life.

Throughout history the focus of human searching for answers has moved from the spirit to the mind and back to the spirit again, like a pendulum. In those brief moments when the same balance of mind and spirit the Greeks discovered has been experienced, the outcome was something great and good. Rome, for example, produced the law. The great achievement of the modern age will probably be considered science. But, says Hamilton, this great achievement itself (science) draws us even further along the swing of the pendulum toward the particular and toward the individual. It has, to be sure, produced the recognition that every human being has rights; but that very recognition has led to an "over-realization" that has blurred the line between justice and injustice.

The struggle of humanity in the modern age is to rediscover the balance between mind and spirit, between the particular and the whole. The modern age, she believes, must learn from the fifth century Athenians the power of reconciling and balancing mind and spirit to rediscover a life of calm serenity. She believes the modern age has much to learn from a moment in time when this perfection was achieved.

Characters

Plato

Plato was a fifth century B.C. Greek philosopher in Athens, who was the student of Socrates, and who attempted to preserve his teaching. Plato was the teacher of Aristotle. A large number of his writings have survived to the present day. Plato is best known for the style of his writing, known as the Platonic dialogues. His writings present dialogues or conversations between people, one of whom is often Socrates, about the large questions of the purpose of human life, the role of the human in the world, and the nature and order of the world. The dialogues are notable because they do not contain direct teaching. Rather they are records of probing conversations that leave it to the reader to draw conclusions and derive his or her own answers.

Plato introduced the notion of "forms" in the universe. In brief, the forms are ideals of everything in the known world, including ideas. The forms never change, even if the actual expressions change. For example, the ideal of a chair remains always the same. The physical chair designed and used at any given time may change. Most important among the ideals or forms are the forms of the virtues - justice, wisdom, courage, etc. - which together create "the good" or "excellence." Human thought, he believed, should be directed toward an understanding of the virtues in an effort to live a life that expresses or embodies "the good" or "excellence." It is also to be noted that society bears the same responsibility as the individual in the expectation that it will strive to embody "excellence." Plato founded a school of philosophy in Athens called "the Academy."

Socrates

Socrates lived in the early part of the fifth century. He was clearly devoted to the examination of the universe and the proper approach to living one's life in the world. He taught through debates and discussions with people of all kinds in various public places. When he reached the age of 70, there was fear and suspicion of new ideas in Athens. His ability to gather crowds of young men who participated in his discussions was viewed as a threat to the social order and he was condemned to death by drinking hemlock. He is the only philosopher ever executed in Athens. His execution is a clear and obvious contradiction to the Athenian belief that men were free to think and speak as they wished.

Socrates' approach to the great questions of life was to probe, to investigate, and to analyze. This questioning approach to the quest for truth has come to be known as the "Socratic method." The method was particularly encouraged for individual self-examination that would lead the individual to an understanding of the meaning of virtue. Socrates' teachings are primarily known through the writings of his student, Plato. It is

difficult to determine how much in the dialogues represents the pure form of his teaching and how much reflects Plato's own philosophy.

Pindar

Pindar was a poet of the early fifth century in Athens who wrote odes to the heroes of his day, comparing them with the heroes of history, in an effort to demonstrate that the virtues and requirements of the aristocratic creed could still be seen in a time that was rapidly moving toward the creation of democracy. He is characterized by Hamilton as the last defender of the old Athenian aristocracy and the beliefs that supported its continuation.

Aristophanes

Aristophanes was a fifth century comic playwright in Athens. He is the representative of "Old Comedy" in Greece. Hamilton compares "Old Comedy" to modern comics. It is probably closer to two comic forms that arose after Hamilton's writing, lampooning and the roast. Greek comedy brought to light the frailties and foibles of the leading people of the day, as well as the institutions and actions of the society. By holding everything up to parody, ridicule and satire, comedy provided both entertainment and social critique. The best known and most exemplary of Aristophanes' comedies is probably "The Frogs" in which he parodies Aeschylus and Euripides

Herodotus

Herodotus was the first historian. He observed the world during the fifth century and wrote about what he saw and what he thought he learned about the world. In particular, Herodotus was the historian of the Athenian victory over Persia. He believed the small city-state was victorious over the great empire because the Athenians were free men defending their freedom against tyranny and despotism. He is renowned for his ability to bring objectivity to his observation and investigation of the world and human life. Hamilton sees him as "a shining instance of the strong Greek bent to examine and prove or disprove. He had a passion for finding out."

Thucydides

Thucydides was the historian of the Peloponnesian War (the war between Athens and Sparta) and of the period of Athenian supremacy following the war. One of the most notable in the historical writing of Thucydides was the notion that history repeats itself in cycles and will continue to do so until humans learn from the past and take action to prevent its recurrence. Also important was the conviction that greed for power and wealth are the root of all evil and the root cause of war.

Xenophon

Xenophon was a fifth century Athenian writer characterized by Hamilton as an ordinary Athenian gentleman. He provides a glimpse of the life of the average educated Athenian. Two of his writings, in particular, are discussed: the "Symposium" and the "Anabasis." The "Anabasis" is of particular interest to Hamilton because it illuminates the distinctive Athenian thinking of the period: that men wanted to think for themselves, make decisions for themselves, define truth for themselves, and act on their own. Hamilton views the "Anabasis" as the story of Athens in miniature.

Aeschylus

Aeschylus was a fifth century Athenian playwright who is considered the father of tragic drama. He introduced to his plays a second actor in order to allow dialogue between the actors. His plays include "The Persians," "The Suppliants," "Prometheus Bound" and the "Orestian Trilogy" which is generally considered his masterpiece. Aeschylus attempts to show "an invincible spirit precisely when disaster is irreparable." His characters meet calamity, pain and suffering with courage and nobility. He viewed and presented pain and suffering, as well as evil, as the path to knowledge.

Sophocles

Sophocles is the second of the great tragedians of the fifth century. For Sophocles external events and the working of fate are beyond the control of humans. Therefore the correct response to pain and suffering is to embrace it and to actively participate in its movement until the end. Humans can remain internally steadfast to virtue and the good no matter what happens around them or to them. Sophocles believed the universe was ordered by eternal laws. He looked for a world in which roles and order reigned supreme. He embraced control, structure and simplicity.

Euripides

Euripides was the third of the Athenian tragedians, and the saddest. He is "the poet of the world's grief." He, more than his predecessors, entered into human pain and suffering and discovered in it purpose and beauty. He explores the suffering of the innocent and delves deeply into the notion of inherited sin and the sins of the parents being visited upon the children. He wrote to show "the hideousness of cruelty and men's fierce passions, and the piteousness of suffering, weak, and wicked human beings, and move men thereby to the compassion which they were learning to forget." Writing at the end of the fifth century, Euripides responds to the change Athens has undergone as she turned from the cradle of democracy and human dignity to the tyrant of the ancient world.

Homer

Homer's writings essentially mark the beginning of Greek literature. His two epic poems, "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" were written in about 800 B.C.. They tell the story of the Trojan War (believed to have occurred around 1100 B.C.). These stories present the Greek Pantheon of gods and goddesses, the heroes of early Greece and the interaction of humans with the gods to work out their destiny. All later Greek literature owes a debt to these poems. They present the classical understanding of heroism as well as attempting to explore the human condition. The two poems together tell the story of the war, of the siege of Troy by the Greeks and the story of Achilles, the hero. Odysseus is credited with the scheme to breach the walls of Troy with the Trojan Horse, but he is condemned by the god Poseidon to wander for ten years before he is allowed to return home to his family.

Hesiod

Hesiod's poem, "Theogony" was written about 700 B.C.. It is the primary source of information about the Greek Pantheon and about the various gods and goddesses of Greek mythology. His other major work "Works and Days" presents a picture of life in the rural parts of the country.

William Shakespeare

Shakespeare was a 16th century English playwright who produced an amazing number of plays, both tragedies and comedies. Hamilton considers Shakespeare the fourth of the great tragic playwrights of history (with Aeschylus, Sohpocles and Euripides).

John Milton

John Milton was a poet in 17th century England, and is considered the most important poet of the period. He wrote three major poerms: "Paradise Lost," "Paradise Regained" and "Samson Agonistes." He is particularly noted for the musicality of his poetic phrasing and meter.

Aristotle

This student of Plato at the Academy reached maturity in the fourth century B.C.. By the middle of the fourth century, Aristotle established a school of his own called "the Lyceum." Aristotle is of the greatest importance for the later development of philosophical thought. His focus was on understanding the complex nature of the world. He rejected Plato's theory of forms and believed they are not unchanging. Aristotle concluded that the highest form, "the good" means different things for different

creatures. Humans, he said, must come to an understanding of their own unique nature and derive from that the meaning of happiness and virtue.

The Stoics

Stoicism was founded in the third century B.C. by Zeno. The name comes from the fact that Zeno taught in the porticos (stoa) of Athens. Stoicism taught that humans are unique in the universe because of their ability to understand and to respond to the reason that controls the universe. Humans cannot control the world; therefore they must try to understand the world and live by the principles that control the world. They encouraged indifference to the environment. One cannot control what happens in one's life. One can, however, control one's reaction and response to it. The stoics emphasized the essential equality of all humans and the concept of the natural rights of all humans.

Objects/Places

Athensappears in non-fiction

Athens was one of several Greek colonies that grew into city-states after the Dorian invasions of about 750 B.C.. Each of these city-states developed independently and had its unique character and characteristics. Athens is generally considered one of the two greatest of the city-states (Sparta was the other). Athens was also unique among the city-states of Greece. Politically, it was originally an aristocracy of old families who believed they had the right to rule because of training and character. When Solon became ruler in the late sixth century B.C., he made many changes, including ending slavery as a punishment for debt and opening the assembly to all free men. By the fifth century Athens reached an intellectual climax unmatched in western history. It was a time of the flowering of the arts, of philosophy, and of religious life. Athens faces two significant political and military threats during this period: invasion by Persia, which was defeated by the Athenians, and a long and bloody war with Sparta for dominance in the southern region of Greece. Athens prevailed in the Peloponnesian War, but quickly lost sight of her ideals and fell subject to the greed of power and dominance. When the other states in the confederation formed after the war came together and defeated Athens, the greatest achievements in civilization and human thought came to an end.

Spartaappears in non-fiction

Sparta was the second leading city-state in ancient Greece. Sparta was profoundly militarily focused. The society was strictly organized and based on strict education in citizenship and valor. Throughout the classical period Sparta was militarily superior to most of the other city-states and, in fact dominated the region. The defeat of Sparta by Athens was surprising. Sparta's strict discipline and cultural indoctrination allowed the city to recover from the defeat and step into a leadership role in the confederacy in reaction to the growing Athenian tyranny.

Thermopylaeappears in non-fiction

The Greek word of Thermophylae literally means "the hot gates." Thermopylae is the name of a mountain pass in Greece leading from Thessaly into Locris. It was the only way an army could move between Northern to Southern Greece during the classical period. Because the pass was only about 50 feet wide, it was easy to defend with a relatively small military force. It was, therefore, of great strategic importance in time of war. In 480 B.C.E., the Persians, led by Xerxes, tried to invade Greece. Leonidas, king of Sparta, gathered an army of about 3,500 men from several Greek city-states and defended the pass. The Persians tried in vain for two days to fight their way through the pass. A Thessalian, Ephialtes, betrayed the Greeks and showed Xerxes a was over the mountains. The Persians crossed over and surrounded the Greeks. The Greeks

suffered massive losses. All were killed except the Thebans, who surrendered. The name, Thermopylas came to be synonymous with bravery and heroic sacrifice.

Marathonappears in non-fiction

The battle of Marathon, in 490 B.C., was one of the most decisive battles in the world's military history. Marathon is a plain in Greece, about 20 miles from Athens. The Athenians and their allies, the Plataeans, defeated the army of the Persian king Darius on this site. The Athenian army is said to have consisted of about 10,000 men. The Persian army is said to have consisted of 100,000 (although this number is probably exaggerated). When the battle was over, 6400 Persians were dead on the field of battle. The Greeks were said to have lost only 192 men. All of the dead were buried on the battlefield under a great mound. When the Persians gave up the battle and retreated to their ships, Militiades, the Athenian general, chose his fastest runner, Pheidippides, and sent him to take the news to Athens. The runner reached Athens, delivered his message of victory, and fell dead.

Theater of Dionysusappears in non-fiction

Located in Athens, the Theater of Dionysus is probably the most famous of the ancient Greek theaters. The best preserved of these theaters, however, is located in Epidauros. The Theater of Dionysus was the stage for most Greek plays during the period of classical Athens. Greek theaters are, essentially, outdoor amphitheaters. They were built into hills and used either rock or scaffolding for audience seating. The Theater of Dionysus was built in the fourth century.

Peloponnesian Warappears in non-fiction

During the fifth Century B.C., also sometimes called the Age of Pericles, Sparta claimed military supremacy among the city-states of Greece. The city-states allied with Athens had become disgruntled because of high taxes used to construct public buildings in Athens. Sparta instigated and encouraged this dissatisfaction. In 432 B.C., Sparta demanded that Athens let all the Greek cities go free or fight. Athens responded that Sparta must first set free all of its acquisitions in southern Greece. War began the following year. Although the war essentially ended in 415 when the Athenian navy was defeated at Syracuse, Athens refused terms of peace until it rebuilt its navy. But the new navy was also defeated in 405, and the following year, Athens surrendered.

Peloponnesusappears in non-fiction

Peloponnesus refers to the southern peninsula of Greece. It is separated from the mainland by the Corinthian and the Saronic gulfs with a connecting link in the narrow Isthmus of Corinth. During the classical period, the Peloponnesus was divided into six districts.

Mysteriesappears in non-fiction

In Classical Greece, the mysteries were religious celebrations honoring certain gods or goddesses. Only the initiated were permitted to view or participate in these rites, and part of initiation was a vow of secrecy. The purpose of the mysteries was both to render worship and to instruct the people in religious observances and, through dramas, preserve the traditions connected with the divinity.

Greek Sculptureappears in non-fiction

Sculpture during the Classical period is generally believed to have reached its peak in Greece. Praxiteles broke with the traditional artistic expressions of the ancient world and sought to demonstrate beauty in the human form. The Archaic period of Greek sculpture came to an end about 480 B.C. The next major period in Greek sculpture is known as the Attic Period, because the greatest achievements were accomplished in Athens, in the region of Attica. Sculptors throughout Greece were expressing their love for physical beauty which was stimulated by the various athletic games of the period. The most famous sculptor of the period was Phidias, who created the great statues of Zeus for the temple at Olympia and of Athena for the Parthenon. The subjects of their work were idealized (perfect) forms of the human body. Their work is marked by realism, attention to perfect form, and attempts to demonstrate the beauty of the natural world.

Greek Architectureappears in non-fiction

The Age of Pericles, or the Classical Period, was clearly the age of brilliance in architectural design and construction in the ancient world. The key elements of the architecture of this period were proportion and beauty. Greek architects attended to both proportion of the building and the proportion of the building within its geographical context. Much of the building during this period was constructed with white marble. The center of Greek architectural achievement is generally believed to be the hill in Athens called The Acropolis. Three structures in particular, demonstrate the perfection of the three "orders" of columns in buildings. The Parthenon was a temple, with Doric columns; the Erectheum was also a temple, built with Ionic columns; and the Propylaea, a gateway, was built of part Doric and part Ionic columns. The third order, Corinthian, was not developed until the reign of Alexander the Great.

Themes

East and West

The first of the major themes running throughout this book is the dichotomy between the East and the West and the culture of each. Hamilton characterizes the East as essentially inferior to the West because it is guided by fear of reality and religious and philosophical efforts to find meaning apart from the natural world. People, she says, look at their lives under tyrants and despots and see no hope of changing their condition or rising to a better life. Rulers in the east work in concert, she says, with the priests of established religion and propagate compliance and submission to the prevailing social order. This social order, she says, maintains its power and authority by handing out truth as it is defined and determined by the rulers and the priests. The people are reduced to attention to survival under dehumanizing conditions.

In the social and political structures of the East, she says, the people see only evil, pain and suffering in the world. They have no hope of anything better in this world or in this life. Their hope and their aspirations are thus directed beyond the natural world and beyond this life. Religion becomes the supplier of the means of magical manipulation of forces arrayed against the individual, whether they are fate, physical condition, or the suffering caused by the world order. Elaborate rites are developed to attempt to change conditions and to offer assurance of a better life in another world after death.

The West, on the other hand, at least in the fifth century, is characterized by a focus on critical analysis of the world and the human condition, by intelligent reflection on the suffering and pain of individuals and attempts to offer rational solutions to these struggles in the here and now. The west looks for and finds the beauty of the natural world and of human existence and values each individual who is believed to have a certain inherent and natural dignity, as well as a natural ability to search for truth and determine his/her own destiny. The culture and the intellectual and social achievements of fifth century Athens are understood to be the prototype of Western culture.

Mind and Spirit

The second major theme of the book is the dichotomy between the life of the mind and the life of the spirit. For Hamilton, human history is the story of a pendulum swinging between mind and spirit, rarely and only briefly passing the center point which is marked by a balance of the two forces in human life. Spirit observes and reacts; mind investigates and orders. Spirit can only be expressed in symbol and in elaboration of the natural forms of things. Spirit must look beyond the natural world to see symbols of what it cannot express. Mind, on the other hand, embraces the natural world and sees its beauty.

Mind and spirit are most evident in the art of a society. A society guided by mind produces art that reflects its recognition of order and beauty in the natural world. Proportion, simplicity, and appreciation of the beauty of perfection of the natural form are the goal of the art of the mind. Adornment, symbolic elaboration and individuality are the characteristics of the art of the spirit.

The life of the mind sees the whole and sees the individual in proportion to the whole and clearly as a part of the whole. The life of the spirit sees the individual and attends only to the perfection and symbolism of the individual. The Athenians of the fifth century, says Hamilton achieved a balance of mind and spirit that is largely without equal in human history.

Truth and Excellence

Hamilton uncovers in the writings of the fifth century in Athens a quest for truth and a commitment to excellence. Throughout the dichotomy between mind and spirit and between East and West are different ways of searching for and defining Truth and different ways of understanding what is right and good in human existence.

The people of the East and of the life defined by the spirit sought to define truth beyond the natural world. Truth was to be accepted in the teachings of the priests; it was to be apprehended in magical religious rites and sacrifices designed to persuade the prevailing forces of the universe to act in certain ways and to reveal eternal truth. Excellence or the good was defined in terms of obedience to truth dispensed and conformity with established norms and mores.

The people of the West who followed the life of the mind, however, looked at the natural world and discovered in it an order and purpose that pointed to a god of reason and rationality. They saw in the universe a harmony and simplicity and beauty that gave life in the present meaning. Rather than trying to change the ordered working of natural and divine laws, they sought to understand the ordered working of the whole and to apprehend the role and the place of the individual within the whole. This understanding indicated that truth could be grasped and that life could be ordered in keeping with the movement and the order of the universe. It convinced them that human life, even flawed and evil actions in the world, have purpose and meaning. It allowed them to extrapolate a definition the good that was to be the goal and the guide of all human endeavor.

Style

Perspective

Edith Hamilton was a life-long student of the classics and of classical culture and society. She was deeply steeped in the Greek language and fluent in the literature of classical Greece. She has long been considered one of the most astute observers of classical culture and one of its most outstanding teachers.

"The Greek Way" is the product of a love of classical Greek culture and a desire to share with readers an appreciation of the unique and timeless accomplishments of a society that rose and fell in a brief historical era. Her comfort with the language and the literature of classical Athens are apparent on every page of the book, as is her general knowledge of literature and society throughout history.

The preface indicates that she not only wanted to share this knowledge for the sake of informing an audience of readers interested in classical Greek culture, but that she found in this culture timeless truth which she believed would inform a later generation in its search for beauty and truth and its pursuit of excellence. When the second edition was published in 1942, the world was at a most significant turning point. New answers were needed, new understandings of truth must be found, the individual needed to reevaluate his/her place in the whole, and above all, balance between mind and spirit was needed. Hamilton believed that the answer for any society in crisis could be found in a re-examination of the intellectual and spiritual achievement of classical Athens. She believed that by pointing modern readers to the writings of this period, she could provide a guide for them in their quest.

Tone

Hamilton writes in a style that is certainly prose, yet it is undoubtedly influenced by the cadences and poetic beauty of her subjects. Hamilton offers an objective, although clearly sympathetic, overview of the intellectual and spiritual achievement of fifth century Athenian culture. Her appreciation and her exuberance for the subject are both clear and infectious to the reader. It is difficult to read the book and not come away from it with a similar appreciation.

Hamilton's clear distain for the spiritual enthusiasm and the religious practices of the eastern nations in the fifth century and of exuberant spiritualism in general might be somewhat uncomfortable for some modern readers. The reader must bear in mind her purpose in writing and bear in mind that in the end it is neither exclusively the life of the spirit nor the life of the mind that she approves and admires. Indeed, her final analysis is that a balance of mind and spirit is the life to be most cherished.

Her comparisons and examples from familiar later literature are appropriate and informative. Indeed, without her exceptional comfort in the language of the time, it would

otherwise be quite difficult for the reader to enter into her evaluation of the poetic achievements of the writers she discusses.

Structure

The final edition and format of the book reveal a few seams as the new chapters are interwoven with the chapters of the first edition. A certain amount of repetition remains in a few places. This is not, however, a distraction or a flaw in the structure of the book.

Hamilton has carefully planned a structure that provides a basic groundwork and introduction to the prevailing thought patterns of the time. She has grouped the writers she discusses according to genre and then chronologically. This is a logical and functional structure for the book. Each genre is introduced in terms of its development, its growth and achievements during the classical period, and in terms of its influence upon later literature. In each case, she provides the appropriate context of understanding from which to analyze each of the writers.

The single flaw in the format and structure of the book might be her assumption that her readers are knowledgeable of the history of the classical world. For many readers, it might be helpful to find a chapter that outlined the history she discusses. In particular, it might be helpful to have more information about the war with Persia, its causes and its broader results. The same is true of the Peloponnesian War. Some additional background on the characters in the writings she discusses and the essential conflict of some of the dramas might be helpful to a reader lacking her intimate knowledge of all of the literature of the period.

Quotes

"The creed of democracy, spiritual and political liberty for all, and each man a willing servant of the state, was the conception which underlay the highest reach of Greek genius. It was fatally weakened by the race for money and power in the Periclean age; the Peloponnesian War destroyed it and Greece lost it forever. Nevertheless, the ideal of free individuals unified by a spontaneous service to the common life was left as a possession to the world, never to be forgotten."

"The special characteristic of the Greeks was their power to see the world clearly and at the same time as beautiful. Because they were able to do this, they produced art distinguished from all other art by an absence of struggle, marked by a calm and serenity which is theirs alone."

"There is a life which is higher than the measure of humanity: men will live it not by virtue of their humanity, but by virtue of something in them that is divine. We ought not to listen to those who exhort a man to keep to man's thoughts, but to live according to the highest thing that is in him, for small though it be, in power and worth it is far above the rest." (Aristotle)

"The Greeks did not abstract away the outside world to prefer the claims of the world within; neither did they deny the spirit in favor of its incarnation. To them the frame and the picture fitted; the things that are seen and the things that are not seen harmonized."

"For a hundred years Athens was a city where the great spiritual forces that war in men's minds flowed along together in peace; law and freedom, truth and religion, beauty and goodness, the objective and the subjective - there was a truce to their eternal warfare, and the result was the balance and clarity, the harmony and completeness, the word Greek has come to stand for. They saw both sides of the paradox of truth, giving predominance to neither, and in all Greek art there is an absence of struggle, a reconciling power, something of calm and serenity, the world has yet to see again."

"But in truth what the Greeks discovered, or rather how they made their discoveries and how they brought a new world to birth out of the dark confusions of an old world that had crumbled away, is full of meaning for us today who have seen an old world swept away in the space of a decade or two. It is worth our while in the confusions and bewilderments of the present to consider the way by which the Greeks arrived at the clarity of their thought and the affirmation of their art. Very different conditions of life confronted them from those we face, but it is ever to be borne in mind that though the outside of human life changes much, the inside changes little, and the lesson-book we cannot graduate from is human experience."

"We are composite creatures, made of soul and body, mind and spirit. When men's attention is fixed upon one to the disregard of the others, human beings result that are only partially developed, their eyes blinded to half of what life offers and the great world holds."

"'The exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence in a life affording them scope' is an old Greek definition of happiness. It is a conception permeated with energy of life."

"They could never leave anything obscure. Neither could they leave anything unrelated. System, order, connection, they were impelled to seek for. An unanalyzed whole was an impossible conception for them."

"The dignity and the significance of human life - of these, and of these alone, tragedy will never let go. Without them there is no tragedy. To answer the question, what makes a tragedy, is to answer the question wherein lies the essential significance of life, what the dignity of humanity depends upon in the last analysis. Here the tragedians speak to us with no uncertain voice. The great tragedies themselves offer the solution to the problem they propound. It is by our power to suffer, above all, that we are of more value than the sparrows. . . . Deep down, when we search out the reason for our conviction of the transcendent worth of each human being, we know that it is because of the possibility that each can suffer so terribly."

"The way of Greek religion could not be different from the ways of religions dependent not upon each man's seeking the truth for himself, as an artist or a poet must seek it, but upon an absolute authority to which each man must submit himself. In Greece there was no dominating church or creed, but there was a dominating ideal which everyone would want to pursue if he caught sight of it. Different men saw it differently. It was one thing to the artist, another to the warrior. 'Excellence' is the nearest equivalent we have to the world they commonly used for it, but it meant more than that. It was the utmost perfection possible, the very best and highest a man could attain to, which when perceived always has a compelling authority. A man must strive to attain it. We needs must love the highest when we see it."

Topics for Discussion

What are the most enduring characteristics of Greek tragedy?

How did the Peloponnesian War change the mood and the thinking of the Athenians?

What are the particular merits of the method of the Platonic dialogues?

What are the major differences between the Eastern and the Western world views?

What difference does one's sense of perspective make on the way one answers questions of human meaning?

Why did tragedy speak so compellingly to the mind and soul of the fifth century Athenians?

How did the Old Comedy address the human condition?

Is Hamilton's characterization of the eternal contributions of Athenian culture in the fifth century correct? If not, what are its flaws?