



Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus

John M. Cooper

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This is a major reinterpretation of ancient philosophy that recovers the long Greek and Roman tradition of philosophy as a complete way of life--and not simply an intellectual discipline. Distinguished philosopher John Cooper traces how, for many ancient thinkers, philosophy was not just to be studied or even used to solve particular practical problems. Rather, philosophy--not just ethics but even logic and physical theory--was literally to be lived. Yet there was great disagreement about how to live philosophically: philosophy was not one but many, mutually opposed, ways of life. Examining this tradition from its establishment by Socrates in the fifth century BCE through Plotinus in the third century CE and the eclipse of pagan philosophy by Christianity, *Pursuits of Wisdom* examines six central philosophies of living--Socratic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Epicurean, Skeptic, and the Platonist life of late antiquity.

The book describes the shared assumptions that allowed these thinkers to conceive of their philosophies as ways of life, as well as the distinctive ideas that led them to widely different conclusions about the best human life. Clearing up many common misperceptions and simplifications, Cooper explains in detail the Socratic devotion to philosophical discussion about human nature, human life, and human good; the Aristotelian focus on the true place of humans within the total system of the natural world; the Stoic commitment to dutifully accepting Zeus's plans; the Epicurean pursuit of pleasure through tranquil activities that exercise perception, thought, and feeling; the Skeptical eschewal of all critical reasoning in forming their beliefs; and, finally, the late Platonist emphasis on spiritual concerns and the eternal realm of Being.

Pursuits of Wisdom is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding what the great philosophers of antiquity thought was the true purpose of philosophy--and of life.

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