

# Ten Key Greek Philosophical Terms



## Introduction

*anamnesis*    *andreia*    *arete*    *ataraxia*    *dialektike*

*enkrateia*    *epoche*    *nous*    *pronoia*    *soteria*



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## Introduction: The *Prisca Theologia*



**T**HE following pages are dedicated to a simple conjecture, summarized as follows:

1. There was in ancient times a pure or 'pristine' religion ([\*prisca theologia\*](#)), uncontaminated by modernism.
2. Ancient Greek sages understood the *prisca theologia*. Socrates, an inheritor of this tradition, wrote nothing. His teachings were not doctrinal, but relied on eliciting insight by his personal example and by asking questions.
3. From Socrates there sprung forth diverse philosophical schools: Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Skepticism, Cynicism, etc.
4. The *prisca theologia* is latently present in more or less its entirety within these Socratic schools collectively, but not individually.
5. If there is a true and authentic philosophy, it must be discoverable and verifiable by personal introspection and experience. Therefore, philosophical education should not focus on doctrine so much as the raw materials that enable individuals to discover the true philosophy spontaneously.
6. For this, definitions are especially helpful, because they equip the mind with new concepts. For example, consider how difficult it would be to use one's hand if there were not the word, 'hand', which distinguishes the hand from the rest of the arm. This obvious principle is no less true in the area of introspection. If a person has a rich philosophical vocabulary, one's ability to reflect on experience and life's meaning is greatly enhanced.

It should therefore be possible to teach the essential, experiential meaning of Greek philosophy by supplying key definitions, and de-emphasizing doctrine. Let us then test the conjecture in the following pages, which treat of ten leading Greek philosophical terms.

### References

Hadot, Pierre. [\*What Is Ancient Philosophy?\*](#) (Michael Chase, trans.). Harvard University Press, 2002. ISBN 0674007336. (Original: *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, 1995)

Kingsley, Peter. [\*Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition\*](#). Oxford University Press, 1997. ISBN 0198150814.



## αναμνησις

Transliteration: *anamnesis*  
Definition: Remembering, unforgetting, recollection, insight  
Pronunciation: ahn-ahm'-neh-sis ([hear](#))

## Explanation

- According to Socrates and Plato, the most important forms of knowledge come not from instruction, but by a re-awakening of already existing dormant or latent knowledge. This is called anamnesis (*an-* = un-, *amnesia* = forgetting, as in *amnesia*; ).
- Anamnesis comes in the form of "aha!" experiences -- insights, moments of unusual clarity, peak experiences, etc.
- It involves only certain forms of knowledge: moral (e.g., what is goodness?), existential (e.g., what is the authentic 'me'?), spiritual/metaphysical, and mathematical.
- Truths understood by anamnesis, valuable in themselves, also serve as first principles for reasoning about oneself and one's life. Conclusions based on these truths are more certain and correct than those based on *false opinion* (see [epoche](#)), which is typically distorted by desires and fears.
- Anamnesis, thus, leads to a genuine life, whereas false opinion promotes inauthenticity.
- Anamnesis can be elicited by the practice of [dialectic](#).

## Example

This scene is a beautiful example of an anamnesis experience. It's from the film, 'Joe vs. the Volcano'. Joe (Tom Hanks) has been stranded on a raft in the ocean for several days...



## Reading

In Plato's [\*Meno\*](#), Socrates illustrates anamnesis by drawing forth from an uneducated slave boy a complex geometric proof, merely by asking simple questions and relying on the boy's latent knowledge.

- Plato's [\*Meno\*](#) (see sections 82-85).



## ανδρεία

|                  |                                       |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Transliteration: | <i>andreia</i>                        |
| Definition:      | Manliness, courage, manly spirit      |
| Pronunciation:   | ahn-dray'-ia ( <a href="#">hear</a> ) |

## Explanation

- *Andreia*, 'manly' spirit, is needed to counter faint-heartedness, laziness, and over-attachment to pleasure.
- It involves an attitude of 'taking the fight to the enemy', where the enemy is ones own foolishness, vice and ignorance.
- Misused it manifests itself as anger, aggression and military vain-glory.
- Properly used it involves self-directed, constructive anger.
- *Andreia* also manifests itself as a willingness for, even a love of, toil and effort.
- It is one of the [four cardinal virtues](#), along with prudence (*phronesis*), temperance (*sophrosyne*), and justice (*dikaiosyne*).
- Aristotle noted that, as with other virtues, andreia is an optimal level (a "mean") between the extremes of too little courage (cowardliness) and too much courage (rashness).

## Discussion

The great demigod hero of Greek mythology, Hercules, symbolizes *andreia*. His famed labors can be interpreted allegorically to represent activities of this virtue on the path toward wisdom and salvation. For example, Hercules slaying the hydra, at an allegorical level, symbolizes the fierce combat needed to defeat ones ego.



Andreia has a social as well as a personal dimension:

"It is more in accord with nature to emulate the great Hercules and undergo the greatest toil and trouble for the sake of aiding or saving the world, if possible, than to live in seclusion."

~ Cicero, *De officiis*, 3.5

Of all the classical virtues, in modern times it is, arguably, *andreia* in which people today are most lacking. Indeed, in our politically correct, nebbish world, it is scarcely even recognized as a virtue!

## Reading

- Aristotle's [Nicomachean Ethics, Book 2, Chapter 8](#)
- Plato's dialogue, [Laches \(online text\)](#).



## αρετη

Transliteration:     *arete* or *areté*  
Definition:         Virtue, excellence, moral excellence  
Pronunciation:     ah-reh-'tay ([hear](#))

## Explanation

No English word or phrase captures the exact meaning of *arete*. The nearest equivalents are 'excellence' and 'virtue'. But there is something more to *arete* which cannot be expressed in words. There is something of the Divine in it. Perhaps the only true way to understand *arete* is to consider two or more examples of excellence and to contemplate what it is they share.

What does it mean when we say of an action, an artistic work, or some flawless athletic maneuver, that it is excellent? To behold what is excellent, in whatever form, brings us the same joy. We perform an action with excellence and say, "perfect!". In the moment of excellence, something transcends the mundane and touches the Ideal.

For Plato, *arete* is mainly associated with *moral* excellence. It is superordinate to specific moral virtues of Courage, Temperance, Justice, etc.; something they all share, a special, unnamed quality, their essence. It is clearly related to Goodness, but not the same thing.

For Aristotle, something is excellent when it manifests its unique purpose or *telos*. The unique, defining quality of human beings, for Aristotle, what makes them distinct from other creatures, is the capacity for rational thought. Human excellence, then, involves the correct use of reason, principally in connection with moral choice.

## Reading

- [Aristotle, "What is the Life of Excellence?"](#)





## αταραξία

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Transliteration: | <i>ataraxia</i>  |
| Definition:      | imperturbability, freedom from disturbance, equipoise, tranquility |
| Pronunciation:   | at-ar-ax'-ia ( <a href="#">hear</a> )                              |

## Explanation

- *Ataraxia* is a *state of consciousness*, characterized by freedom from mental agitation.
- It is an important concept for several Hellenistic schools of philosophy, including the Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics, though each school tends to have a slightly different interpretation of *ataraxia*. Our definition here is closest to the Sceptic school.
- The derivation of the term is instructive: *a* is a privative, i.e. meaning 'not'; *taraxia* is the condition of being confused, disturbed, agitated, roiled, muddied or darkened -- qualities which unfortunately characterize the quality of waking consciousness much of the time.
- It is often supposed that *ataraxia* implies passivity and quiet contemplation, but that is not necessarily so. *Ataraxia* can also be experienced during activity; this is action which is both internally and externally harmonized and in accord with Nature -- i.e., a *flow state* characterized by effortless action, following divine inspiration without resistance (see Example below).
- *Ataraxia* can be distinguished from a related condition, *apatheia*, or freedom from disordered passions and emotions (*pathos* = passion). Thus *apatheia* is absence of disordered passions themselves (which have other effects besides mental disturbance); while *ataraxia* is specifically the freedom from mental disturbance.
- Hence, we achieve *ataraxia* in part by means of *apatheia*. It's important to understand that the problem here is not having passions -- passions themselves come from Nature. But rather our *false opinions* cause us to misconstrue or exaggerate passions. Hence we reach *apatheia* and *ataraxia* by ridding ourselves of false opinions. One principal means of this is by [epoche](#) and other strategies related to Pyrrhonic skepticism
- One of the fruits, so to speak, of *ataraxia* is joy (*chara*).
- The literature of Christian mysticism emphasizes a possibly related state, called *recollection* (Spanish: *recogimiento*, or re-gathering; recollection in this sense is not to be



confused with remembering or *anamnesis*). This subject is treated most definitively by [Francisco de Osuna](#), whose writings directly influenced St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross.

## Example

Sextus Empiricus supplies an example of *ataraxia*::

"The Sceptic, in fact, had the same experience which is said to have befallen the painter [Apelles](#). Once, they say, when he was painting a horse and wished to represent in the painting the horse's foam, he was so unsuccessful that he gave up the attempt and flung at the picture the sponge on which he used to wipe the paints off his brush, and the mark of the sponge produced the effect of a horse's foam. So, too, the Sceptics were in hopes of gaining quietude [*ataraxia*] by means of a decision regarding the disparity of the objects of sense and of thought, and being unable to effect this they suspended judgment; and they found that quietude, as if by chance, followed upon their suspense. (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.28—29)

Significantly, the example involves an action -- Apelles tossing his sponge at the painting. The anecdote could be interpreted as follows: Apelles was trying too hard to paint the horses. When this didn't work, he gave up control and acted in a completely spontaneous way, the effect was achieved; hence this exemplifies what we above called active *ataraxia*.

## Reading

- Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. [On Tranquility](#). In: *Seneca - Volume II. Moral Essays*. Translated by John W. Basore. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932.
- Sextus Empiricus. [Outlines of Pyrrhonism](#). Translated by R. G. Bury. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933.
- Warren, James. [Epicurus and Democritean Ethics: An Archaeology of Ataraxia](#). Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN 0521813697.



## ΔΙΑΛΕΚΤΙΚΕ

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Transliteration: | <i>dialektike</i>  |
| Definition:      | Analysis, often by question and answer, intended to discover noetic first principles |
| Pronunciation:   | dahy-uh-'lek-ti-kay  |

## Explanation

The purpose of *dialektike*, ultimately, is to replace *false opinion* with true knowledge by eliciting *noetic* insights. It aims, then, to open the eyes of the soul, or, we might also say, to activate or engage the [Nous](#).

With Socrates and Plato, *dialektike* is often associated with a systematic posing and answering of questions (i.e., the 'Socratic method' or [elenchus](#)).

*Dialektike* is etymologically related to, but not synonymous with *dialogue*, a conversation between two parties. Hence we may speak of a "dialectical dialogue". Or *dialectic* may be pursued in a form other than dialogue.

Among the noetic insights dialectic may elicit are glimpses of the essence of virtues and Platonic [Forms](#) (Beauty, Goodness, Courage, etc.); or also logical principles and relations. Three common techniques are:

- contradiction — basically, *reductio ad absurdum* reasoning that demonstrates impossibilities which derive from an initial premise;
- collection (*synagoge*) of similar items or examples, seeking to discover what their common principle is or to what genus they all belong;
- division ([dairesis](#)), or splitting some category into reasonable subdivisions.

*Dialektike* is to be contrasted with contentious argument ([eristic](#)). *Eristic* is a zero-sum game (your gain is proportional to my loss); *dialektike* is a non-zero-sum (both win) game. With *eristic*, two parties are adversaries — but, with *dialektike*, partners. Participants in *dialektike* experience the felicity of camaraderie. These amiable feelings promote discovery, whereas the animosity of *eristic* opposes it.

An excellent technique for dialectical discussion is to have each party alternately defend and critique both sides of a particular issue.

The principles of dialectical dialogue may also be applied to one's own internal 'discussions' and deliberations.

## Reading

- Plato's [\*Laches\*](#)



## εγκρατεία

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Transliteration: | <i>enkrateia</i> or <i>enkratia</i>         |
| Definition:      | Self-governance, self-mastery, self-control |
| Pronunciation:   | en-'krah-tay-a ( <a href="#">hear</a> )     |

## Explanation

*Enkrateia* is often defined as self-control, but a much better definition is self-governance. The root *kratia* means government, and is the basis of such words as democracy (*demokratia*, rule by the people, plutocracy, rule of the rich, etc.).

Many modern psychologists have observed that the human personality is characterized by numerous, more or less distinct 'sub-egos': at various times we are a father, mother, child, teacher, student, worker, friend, enemy, moralist, sensualist, etc. Of great concern is to orchestrate these diverse facets into a harmonious whole, rather than a chaotic jumble of conflicting desires and actions. Effective self-government in this sense is *enkrateia*; its absence (a chaotic, disorganized personality), or lack of self-government, is called *akrasia*.

Psychologically, *enkrateia* can be thought of as the development or emergence a specialized sub-ego, an Inner Governor or Inner Lawgiver, which directs the others. This theme is the topic of Plato's *Republic*, which, contrary to popular belief, is not mainly about how to design an ideal political state; rather, it uses the example of a physical city-state as a metaphor to understand the principles of inner, self-governance.

This inner governor is sometimes in Greek philosophy called the *hegemonikon* (i.e., leader; related to the modern word 'hegemony'), although *hegemonikon* has other meanings as well.

For Plato, the only effective form this inner governor can take is that of a philosopher or lover of wisdom. Yet this philosopher leader has a most difficult task, because other sub-egos, especially those concerned with inordinate self-love and sensual pleasures, are prone to rebellion. Concerning this Plato presents an elaborate metaphor of a ship's captain and mutiny-prone crew:

[488a] ... Picture a shipmaster in height and strength surpassing all others on the ship,

[488b] but who is slightly deaf and of similarly impaired vision, and whose knowledge of navigation is on a par with his sight and hearing. Conceive the sailors to be wrangling with one another for control of the helm, each claiming

that it is his right to steer though he has never learned the art and cannot point out his teacher or any time when he studied it. And what is more, they affirm that it cannot be taught at all, but they are ready to make mincemeat of anyone who says that it can be taught,

[488c] and meanwhile they are always clustered about the shipmaster importuning him and sticking at nothing to induce him to turn over the helm to them. And sometimes, if they fail and others get his ear, they put the others to death or cast them out from the ship, and then, after binding and stupefying the worthy shipmaster with mandragora or intoxication or otherwise, they take command of the ship, consume its stores and, drinking and feasting, make such a voyage of it as is to be expected from such, and as if that were not enough, they praise and celebrate as a navigator,

[488d] a pilot, a master of shipcraft, the man who is most cunning to lend a hand in persuading or constraining the shipmaster to let them rule, while the man who lacks this craft they censure as useless. They have no suspicions that the true pilot must give his attention to the time of the year, the seasons, the sky, the winds, the stars, and all that pertains to his art if he is to be a true ruler of a ship, and that he does not believe that there is any art or science of seizing the helm

[488e] with or without the consent of others, or any possibility of mastering this alleged art and the practice of it at the same time with the science of navigation. With such goings-on aboard ship do you not think that the real pilot would in very deed be called a star-gazer, an idle babbler,

[489a] a useless fellow, by the sailors in ships managed after this fashion? (Plato, *Republic* 6.488; Paul Shorey, translator)

The task is difficult, Plato suggests, but by no means impossible; and, in any case, necessary for happiness.

When other sub-egos succeed in wresting control of the 'ship of the self' from the philosopher leader, chaos results: the personality becomes confused, agitated, and disorganized. In a sense, this is like a kind of death. One goal of philosophy, then, is to keep the philosopher in charge, so that the genuine, authentic personality (i.e., of the harmonized kind, which functions in accord with God's will and Nature), remains in leadership continuously, i.e., a kind of 'deathless' (*athanatos*; *thanatos* = death) state.

Approaching the topic in a less mystical vein, Aristotle analyzes and offers many helpful insights about the nature of self-governance.

## Reading

- Kraut, Richard. [Aristotle's Ethics](#). In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).



## Εποχή

Transliteration: *epoche* or *epoché*  
Definition: suspension of judgment  
Pronunciation: eh-poh-chay' ([hear](#))

## Explanation

- Here we have not a single word, but a constellation of related terms that also includes [aporia](#) (a state of 'puzzlement'), [elenchus](#) (investigation by question and answer), and [skeptikos](#) (an attitude of undogmatic investigation). All these relate in a most central way to the mission of Socrates: to call attention to the perils of *false opinion* (or, more accurately, false opining, the process of forming false opinions) and to propose remedies.
- False opining, or [pseudodoxia](#), is an absolutely fundamental problem with human nature, a near universal source of our errors and unhappiness:

Then do you note that mistakes in action also are due to this ignorance of **thinking one knows when one does not?** (Plato, *1st Alcibiades* 117d)

- This *conceit of knowledge* is described more fully in Plato's dialogue, *Laws*:

"The greatest evil to men, generally, is one which is innate in their souls, and which a man is always excusing in himself and so has no way of escaping. I mean what is expressed in the saying that every man is and ought to be dear to himself.... From this same fault arises the common habit of regarding our own ignorance (*amathia*) as wisdom, and of **thinking we know all things when, so to speak, we really know nothing.**" (*Laws* 5.731d)

This ignorance, a result of inordinate self-love, egoism, and wishful thinking (by which desires co-opt and distort reasoning) is the very opposite of the intellectual humility required to [know thyself](#).

- As noted, many of our personal problems are the direct result of false opinion. For example, false opinions about bad things -- that they exist, that they are likely to happen, that they would actually harm us -- are the basis of endless worry, anxiety, fear and hatred. False opinions about presumed goods -- that they are good, that they are what we really

want, etc., beget endless folly, wasted effort, frustration, etc.

- Due to its connection with fear and desire, false opinion contributes to mental disturbance, thus opposing the attainment of mental tranquility, [ataraxia](#).
- Several strategies exist to rid oneself of false opinion, including:
  1. A habit of suspending judgment (*epoche*). The [Pyrrhonic Sceptics](#) raised this to the level of a fine art. [Sextus Empiricus](#), for example, presents several formulaic sentences one can tell oneself to counter false opinion. For example, when one catches oneself holding an opinion without basis, or mistaking an opinion for a fact, one may say:

"For every argument in favor of this view, an equally strong argument can be made against it. Hence I conclude nothing at this time." (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.27)
  2. One can approach questions with a [dialectical attitude](#). That is, rather than simply accepting a received opinion, one always strives to understand problems in terms of their first principles, and then to logically deduce true opinions from these solid foundations. With such an attitude, one is more interested in learning and discovery than in defending self-serving prejudices.
  3. To overcome the inertia of mental laziness and the wishful thinking it produces, the virtue of [andreia](#), or 'manly' courage, is most helpful.

## Reading

- Diogenes Laertius. [Life of Pyrrho](#). In: [Lives Of Eminent Philosophers](#), translated by Robert Drew Hicks. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925.
- Sextus Empiricus, [Outlines of Pyrrhonism](#), translated by Rev. R. G. Bury. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933.



## VOUS

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Transliteration: | <i>Nous</i>  |
| Definition:      | The mental faculty by which one perceives truth, goodness, and divine things; the Intellect. |
| Pronunciation:   | noos ( <a href="#">hear</a> )  |

## Explanation

*Nous* is the special faculty or part of the soul by which one perceives truth and other things of a more divine nature, such as Virtue. The exercise of the *Nous* – i.e., knowing things by means of it – is called *noesis*.

Noesis is often compared to vision; it is something like 'seeing' a truth. When we say, "Ah, now I see your point" and the like, that expresses having a noetic understanding or grasp of a truth or principle.

Today there is no English word in common use that carries the same meaning as *Nous*. As a result, the concept of the *Nous* has all but vanished from modern science. Historically, the words Intellect and Intelligence meant much the same thing as *Nous*; however today that connection is obscured by a very broad meaning of 'intelligence', which can be even applied to animals and machines (because they can, for example, plan and learn). However *Nous* is something like consciousness itself, and, at least with machines, certainly wouldn't be applicable.

Another possible English near-equivalent is *Reason*. But here we must distinguish between Reason and reasoning. Reasoning is a form of discursive thought, whereas *noesis* is direct apprehension of truth. Discursive thought corresponds to what Greek philosophers called *dianoesis*, which is associated with a different mental faculty, the *dianoia*. Reason itself (i.e., *Nous*) is part of reasoning – i.e., the means by which we perceive trueness of an argument or inference.

*Noesis* is sometimes defined as intuition. Again, this is only partly true, because intuition has two common meanings. The first (the ability to understand something immediately, without the need for conscious reasoning) is similar to *noesis*; the second (knowledge that comes from instinctive feeling rather than conscious reasoning) is not.

We are left with the practical difficulty that, in terms of common usage, there are no convenient English words with the same meanings as *Nous* and *noesis*. Therefore it might be advantageous to simply re-introduce the Greek terms into common use. In the case of *noesis*, this seems to be



[gradually happening](#).

## Reading

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- Wallis, Richard T. [NOUS as Experience](#). In: R. Baine Harris (ed.), *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, SUNY Press, 1976, pp. 121–153.



## πρνονοια

Transliteration: *pronoia*  
Definition: Providence, foresight  
Pronunciation: pro-'noi-a ([hear](#))

## Explanation

*Pronoia* in a religious context means *Providence* or *Divine Providence* — the wise and benevolent provision for all our needs by God. It literally means foreknowledge (*pro* = fore; *noia* = knowledge).

*Pronoia* is so important and essential to the ancient religion that the latter might even be called Providentialism.

The principle of *pronoia* is that there is a plan and purpose or end (*telos*) to all creation, and in this plan man plays a central part. The universe assists one who is aligned with the will of God, the creator and governor of the universe.

*All things work together for good to them that love God. ([Romans 8:28](#))*

This principle is found in the works of Plato, Aristotle — and especially the Stoics, for whom happiness and virtue was considered to life "according to Nature"; note that Nature here is more than what we ordinarily call "nature" (flora and fauna, weather, etc.) — but includes all created things, the entire universe (visible and invisible).

Because of the intelligent design, purpose, and providential governance of the universe, all things are connected. This connectedness supplies one explanation for the apparent efficacy of omens and oracles.

Obviously if an all-powerful and all-benevolent God controls everything, then we can trust God and the universe to supply for our needs; and to do so much more effectively that we can for ourselves.

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. ([Proverbs 3:5](#))*

The opposite of humble trust in Providence is *egoism*. Egoistic striving and control is the one

thing that most surely separates us from the plan of Providence.

Abandonment of egoism, and childlike trust in Providence, permits a nondual state of living (nondual in the sense that earthly existence becomes divinized, purer). This state is potentially one main meaning of what the New Testament calls the Kingdom of Heaven:

*Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

*Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?* ([Matthew 34:25-26](#))

The natural response to Providence is a feeling of gratitude:

"Each single thing that comes into being in the universe affords a ready ground for praising Providence, if one possesses these two qualities—a power to see clearly the circumstances of each, and the spirit of gratitude therewith. Without these, one man will fail to see the usefulness of nature's products and another though he see it will not give thanks for them." (Epictetus, [Discourses 1.6](#))

The quote is revealing: if Providence seems absent, it is usually because we fail to see it (or fail to look for it).

The apparent absence of Providential aid is itself often providential: were everything supplied without effort on our part, we would be of little use to ourselves or others.

One must, further, learn retain faith in Providence in the midst of what seems like adversity. It is easy to believe in and praise Providence when things go well, but much harder when we suffer adversity. In fact, to accept difficulty as Providential is almost the quintessential and defining human ethical struggle, as evidenced by the example of the passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ — his very last words on the cross being,

*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.* ([Luke 23:46](#); cf. [Psalms 31:5](#)).

So too, our ego must be crucified so that we may enjoy fullest harmonization with Providence.

The reconciling of adversity and Providence is also an important topic in later Stoic writings.

*Pronoia* in the sense of personal foresight or forethought, a form of wisdom, is also important.

## Reading

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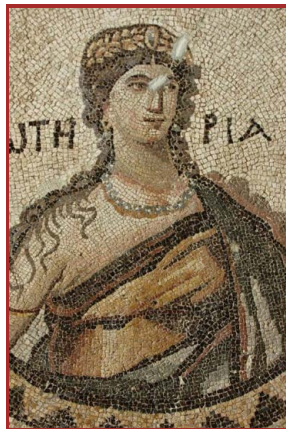


## σωτηρια

Transliteration: *soteria*  
Definition: Salvation, salvific principle, salutary force  
Pronunciation: so-ter-ee'-a ([hear](#))

## Explanation

*Soteria* is what we would today call the *self-actualizing principle*, a beneficent force that guides our development, helping us to reach the desired end of psychological salvation, integration and happiness.



The principle of *soteria* is found throughout Greek philosophy. The name Socrates itself is said to derive from *soter*, which means savior. The fullest explanation of the soteric principle is found in the works of the [Middle Platonist, Philo of Alexandria](#) (20 BC – 50 CE), who formed a synthesis of Greek philosophy and Judaism.

Philo also explains a second principle that opposes *soteria*, namely the destructive or anti-integrative force, *pthora*. It is characteristic of *pthora* to constantly try to unsettle, disturb and confuse. Understanding the nature of this destructive principle is essential for our progress.

Our true enemy, i.e., what opposes our spiritual development, is not, as is sometimes thought, passions, appetites, desires, or sensual pleasure. Rather, it is when these things become disordered -- i.e., when they reach the point of displacing the pursuit of wisdom, virtue, truth, and genuine happiness -- that they become problematic. It is *pthora* that causes this disharmonization of virtue and passions.

In Christianity, the figure of Christ personifies *soteria*. As Christ is understood as teacher, healer, redeemer, Good Shepherd, helmsman etc. of the soul, so all these attributes apply to the soteric principle.



[\(know your adversary\)](#)

The opposing forces of *soteria* and *pthora* are mythologically expressed in the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Typhon. Osiris symbolizes the integrated psyche, and [Typhon](#) (the storm god, from whose name get the word typhoon) symbolizes *pthora*.

## Reading

- Philo of Alexandria. [That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better](#). In: Charles Duke Yonge (translator), [The Works of Philo, Updated Edition](#). David M. Scholer, editor. Hendrickson Publishers, 1993. ISBN 0943575931.
- Plutarch. [Isis and Osiris](#). In: [Plutarch: Moralia, vol. 5](#), translated by Frank Cole Babbitt. Loeb Classical Library edition. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936.

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