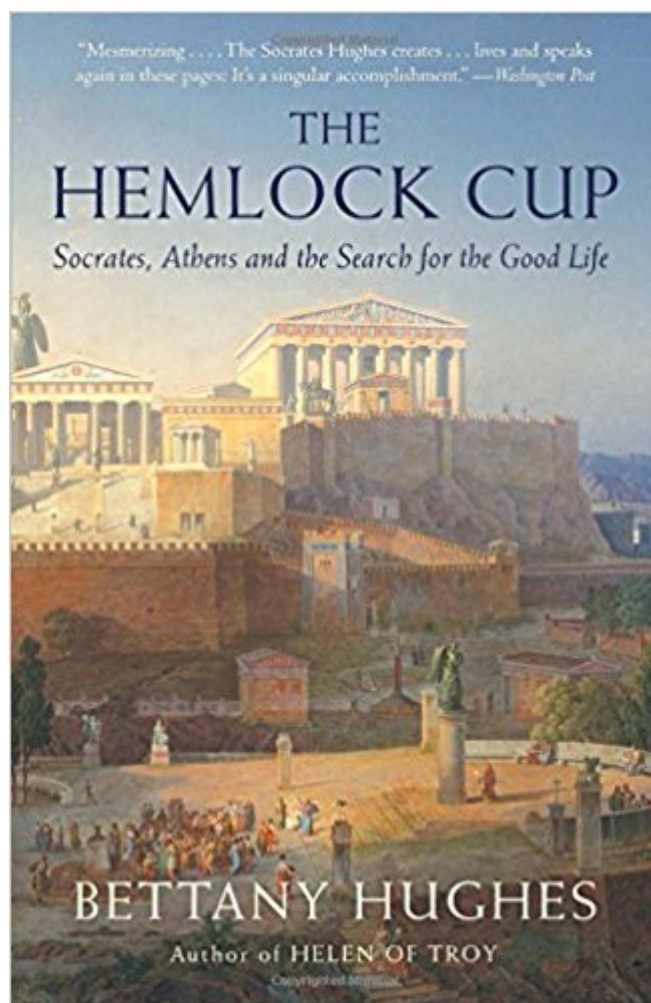


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The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens And The Search For The Good Life



Synopsis

From the celebrated British author and historian: a brilliant new book combining historical inquiry and storytelling to paint an unprecedentedly vivid portrait of Socrates and the Golden Age of classical Athens. "We think the way we do because Socrates thought the way he did; in his unwavering commitment to truth and in the example of his own life, he set the standard for all subsequent Western philosophy. And yet, for twenty-five centuries, he has remained an enigma: a man who left no written legacy and about whom everything we know is hearsay. His life spanned "seventy of the busiest, most wonderful and tragic years in Athenian history. Athens in the fifth century B.C. was a city devastated by war, but, at the same time, transformed by the burgeoning process of democracy. Drawing on the latest sources—archaeological, topographical, and textual—Hughes re-creates the streets where Socrates walked, to place him there, and to illuminate for us the world as he experienced it.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The brilliant cultural historian Hughes (Helen of Troy) has again produced an intriguing and entertaining biohistory of one of the most important individuals in the ancient world, and of the Athenian society that condemned him to death for daring to question all received wisdom. Drawing on the abundance of contemporary references by both supporters and opponents to the philosopher, Hughes illustrates that "absolutely of his time, he is also of ours," "the first ironic man" in an unironic age, a gadfly to Athens' citizens and leaders. Moreover, through careful description of

fifth century B.C.E. Athens, she brings to life the social, political, economic, literary, and military realities of Socrates' society, in particular the centrality of the agora. Hughes devotes a substantial part of her account to the trial and forced suicide of the great philosopher, events which communicated Socratic humor mixed with courage. Regrettably, she offers little in the way of criticism of modern authors such as I.F. Stone who have clouded Socrates's reputation by championing the populist and "democratic" tyrants. But she aptly conveys the continuing urgency of Socrates' devotion to the inquiring mind. 16 pages of color illus.; 33 b&w illus.; 5 maps. (Feb.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

There are certain historical figures whose lives merit perpetual reexamination because their impact continues to reverberate century after century. According to historian Hughes, author of *Helen of Troy: Goddess, Princess, Whore* (2005), Socrates is one of these seminal social and cultural architects. Beginning at the end of Socrates's long life, she reaches back in time, analyzing the historical context responsible, in part, for spawning such an exceedingly influential thinker. If, as she purports, "we think the way we do because Socrates thought the way he did," it is important for us to understand why and how he posited the relentless questions about what it means to be human that drew attention to his famous philosophical method of inquiry and debate. This, then, is not only a lively and eminently readable biography of Socrates the man but also a vivid evocation of Athens, the city-state on the cusp of originating many of the greatest precepts of modern Western civilization. --Margaret Flanagan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The trial and death of Socrates stands alongside that of Jesus of Nazareth as a milestone in our civilization. What these deaths signify is far from clear. Neither man wrote memoirs about what he taught. Both were killed by political authorities intent on doing what politicians always do - keeping order. And both deaths have spawned passionate debate and interest thousands of years after each man breathed his last. Why we do care about these deaths? Bettany Hughes' *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life* provides an answer of a sort. "Home sapiens," she writes, "craves the anonymity of the herd. All of civilization's darkest hours have been bayed on by men who want scapegoats, who want the finger of blame to turn in any direction, as long as it is away from their own face. Loose, jealous tongues are the bane of history." That, at least, is a compelling reason for why Socrates was condemned to death in 399 B.C.E. (The vote

among the 500 jurors sitting in his case was close as to guilt regarding the crimes charged, neglecting the Athens gods and corrupting its youth - 280-220; the vote in favor of death as a penalty was 340 to 160.)Athens lost the Peloponnesian War to Sparta, its population was decimated by disease and war attrition, and the imperial tribute that fed the leisure of its citizenry had dwindled to a trickle. And Socrates was the friend of Alcibiades, a sometime friend, sometime enemy of the city. Surely a scapegoat was needed. Socrates, the infamous Socrates of Plato and Xenophon, was just too different. The Delphic Oracle had reportedly declared no man to be wiser; yet the philosopher proclaimed that he knew no truth. He wandered the streets shoeless, debating endlessly and offending with delight. Socrates, implacable Socrates, philosophized while Athens burned. "We strive for answers, for closure; but all Socrates does is ask questions."Hughes brings ancient Athens to life, weaving the setting for Socrates' life out of historic records and recent archeological evidence. The tone of the book is not the sort of ponderous scholarship often encountered in serious works on ancient Greece. It is rather playful; she is a wit at work and at play, trying to make sense of the life and death of philosophy's founding father. The book caught me off guard, her breezy and almost playful tone put me off at first, but I could not put the book down, even though I profess not to like the writing. How like Socrates this book must be: not altogether pleasing in form, but irresistible. In recent years, I've struggled with the question presented by the historical Jesus. What can we know about this man? Can we know anything? There is so much more written about Socrates by contemporaries, and Plato's dialogues, whether fictive in whole or in part, at least have the ring of truth: he was a witness to what he wrote about. We have no eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus, only Gospels written decades after his death and by men who never broke bread with the man -- nothing admissible, as we lawyers like to say. Why the great need to know about a man who cannot be known, and the easy acceptance of something less than knowledge as to Socrates? One claimed that he was the truth and that to know him was to be set free. He was killed by Roman overlords. Socrates claimed to know nothing save that the unexamined life was not worth living. He was killed by fellow citizens. Perhaps the deaths have little in common. Yet they remain two of the most profound political executions in the history of the West. Hughes has nothing to say about this, of course. Her focus is the Athenian. I will shelve the book this afternoon, but I will miss it a great deal. She's also written a volume on Helen of Troy. I suspect I will soon be in Hughes' hands again. Can she be persuaded to take a try at the death of Jesus?

Just on the last few days of a month travelling around Greece, reading this book and walking in the footsteps of Socrates. The author has done a great job of bringing the times of 5th century BC alive

for me. Also interesting with current time of Greek Financial Crisis due to hold referendum tomorrow. We have loved Greece and the Greek people, so hospitable and family orientated. We are seeing the plebiscite in action in the land where this approach first started, but also where Socrates in the book is reported to have stated that the most valuable thing in life is time for "leisure". I highly recommend the book and also a holiday to Greece to help them in these difficult times.

How better for what it purports to be. The characters I have studied for so long came alive and became immediate familiars.. The mix of the past and present locales, sites and activities raises the book from mere historical fiction to a felt reality. I certainly felt many times that I could walk out my door and be a citizen of Socrates' Athens. In fact I was concerned with how I would choose to vote at his trial. Not as easy as you might think if you are there then. Wish I had read this before all the others. Would have changed my understanding and perceptions of them. Thank you Bettany Hughs!

A wonderfully written life of the most important philosopher of all time. The author provides in depth details of Socrates' life and a thorough description of life in ancient Athens at the height of it's power and it's decline. She provides a detailed description of the profound weaknesses faced by all democratic societies and how they historically lead to tyranny.

This writer is very good at telling a story from a more interesting point of view lacking in most historians. I enjoyed this book very much because I have had an interest in Socrates ever since high school. Although I haven't read Helen of Troy by this author, I may, just because of her treatment of Socrates in the Hemlock Cup.

Illuminating history of 5th Century BCE Greece, dubbed conventionally as its Golden Age, but Hughes makes clear that Socrates lived, fought and served as Athen's gadfly at a time that was anything but golden most of the time. A must read for anyone interested in the role that Greece has played in Western and Eastern cultures. Absolutely riveting.

I LOVED THIS BOOK. SOCRATES, HERODOTUS AND THUCYDIDES ALL LIVED THROUGH THE TIME COVERED. DESPITE MY BACK GROUND IN CLASSICS, THIS BOOK GAVE NEW VITAL DIMENSIONS TO THIS PERIOD OF HISTORY FOR ME, WHICH ADDS TO MY CURRENT INTERESTS.THANK YOU TO BETTANY HUGHES FOR WRITING THIS AMAZING BOOK.

This is an excellent book about Socrates. The feel of the philosopher's Athens can be felt as you turn the pages. Very readable and recommended.

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