

Reviews of:

Eternal Questions: Notes from Ancient Greece

Sylvia Moody

1.

Provocative and stimulating

This slim volume is full of surprises. The eternal questions of the title are the big ones that face every generation. Sylvia Moody approaches them through the eyes of the ancient Greeks, who were famously interested in asking questions and looking for answers. The results are provocative and stimulating, inviting readers to engage in the continuing debate. Moody's crisp analyses are informed by a deep interest in Greek culture, ancient and modern, and Cavafy turns up as often as Homer or Sophocles in the quotations that enrich her writings. This book will stimulate readers to find out more about the Greeks and their ideas.

Professor Pat Easterling, Regius Professor of Greek, Cambridge University

2.

A pleasurable reading experience

"Life is full of questions. Some are trivial and everyday (where did I put my keys?). Some concern important life decisions (shall I emigrate to Australia?). And again some are yet more profound (what is the purpose of life?). Questions of the third kind relate not so much to our individual lives, but to Life itself. They are, you might say, eternal questions."

This is how Sylvia Moody introduces her book and immediately draws her reader in. This book is intended for readers whose knowledge of the Greeks is quite sketchy, but who wish to find out more about the ancient Greeks and their ideas.

Clarity and pace are keynotes of Sylvia Moody's style. She presents a stimulating survey of all the main cultural ideas of the ancient Greek world in separate chapters, covering history, science, philosophy, religion, drama, politics. Without ever losing momentum, she regularly illustrates a point with an apt anecdote, or explains the etymology of a commonplace word, or slips in an interesting fact.

In addition, the main text is punctuated with a series of 'extras' – extended quotations or explanations in shaded boxes, e.g. Pericles' Funeral speech, Zeno's Paradox of the Tortoise, an imaginary interview with Socrates in prison. A further bonus is the inclusion of some poems of Cavafy, aptly chosen to stress the classical continuum and the timeless nature of the eternal questions.

The information given is made very accessible by the author's clear, concise phrasing and the use of sub-headings and bullet points. This means that not only are the book's ideas easily conveyed, but it is also possible to dip in and out of different sections of the text.

In sum, this slim volume is both informative and a pleasurable reading experience. I enjoyed it immensely.

Pam Perkins, London Classical Association magazine

3.

Fascinating!

Books written by authors with feet in two worlds are often fascinating and this slim volume is precisely that! Sylvia Moody is a classicist whose professional calling is that of a psychologist with a special interest in dyslexia. After a brief introductory chapter to the Ancient Greeks, Sylvia poses a series of questions (What is life? Is there a god? What can we know? What can we imagine? How should we behave? What makes a good society? Is life a drama? and What happens when we die?) and then seeks to answer these by references to the mythology, literature and philosophy of the Greeks.

Inevitably Sylvia is highly selective in the material proffered but throughout the book her love of the classical world shines through. Her interest in the language (ancient and modern) is emphasised by the 'Endword' at the conclusion of each chapter where she examines a word relevant to the chapter and encourages the reader to transliterate. In the final pages she adds some guidance to learning the alphabet and thus the language by recommending some Summer Schools. This is an enjoyable read that could spark real interest in a young person or mature student.

Barbara Finney, Journal of Classics Teaching No 1

4.

A good starting point for the lay reader

Sylvia Moody's questions range from 'where did I put my keys?' to 'what is the purpose of Life?', and it is of course this latter type of question which she defines as the Eternal Questions of her title. She adds further questions on god, morals, happiness and death, but she points out that these days people are disinclined to commit themselves to particular belief systems but make use of beliefs from a variety of different traditions.

As her contribution to the debate, she invites us to study the traditions and culture of the Ancient Greeks, especially those of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. She gives a historical background and then goes on to consider their philosophy and religion, their myths and morals, their politics, including Athenian democracy, their views on death and – what is probably their crowning glory – Greek Tragedy, as written by the 5th century BC dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

Obviously in a book of only 100 pages, Sylvia cannot go into great detail. Indeed she subtitles the book *Notes from Ancient Greece*. However, for anyone seeking an overview of the Ancient Greek civilisation, this would make a very good starting point, as Sylvia covers a very wide range of topics and gives many examples of Greek thought which makes one want to investigate the topics further.

As an added bonus she ends each chapter with a word in the original Greek and by the end of the book she has explained all the letters of the Greek alphabet, so that one can readily read and understand Greek words that have come down into English.

Dinah Livingstone, SOFIA magazine