



The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life

By Bettany Hughes

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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, gleaned from the writings of Plato, Xenophon and Aristophanes. Now Bettany Hughes gives us an unprecedented, brilliantly vivid portrait of Socrates and of his homeland, Athens in its Golden Age.

His life spanned “seventy of the busiest, most wonderful and tragic years in Athenian history.” It was a city devastated by war, but, at the same time, transformed by the burgeoning process of democracy, and Hughes re-creates this fifth-century B.C. city, drawing on the latest sources—archaeological, topographical and textual—to illuminate the streets where Socrates walked, to place him there and to show us the world as he experienced it.

She takes us through the great, teeming Agora—the massive marketplace, the heart of ancient Athens—where Socrates engaged in philosophical dialogue and where he would be condemned to death. We visit the battlefields where he fought, the red-light district and gymnasias he frequented and the religious festivals he attended. We meet the men and the few women—including his wife, Xanthippe, and his “inspiration” and confidante, Aspasia—who were central to his life. We travel to where he was born and where he died. And we come to understand the profound influences of time and place in the evolution of his eternally provocative philosophy.

Deeply informed and vibrantly written, combining historical inquiry and storytelling élan, *The Hemlock Cup* gives us the most substantial, fascinating, humane depiction we have ever had of one of the most influential thinkers of all time.

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Download and Read Free Online **The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life** By Bettany Hughes

Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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.)

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From [Booklist](#)

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' 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

Review

"Fascinating . . . What Bettany Hughes provides is something vital: a life and times of Socrates that is so richly textured, flavorful and atmospheric that it makes human this most enigmatic of all philosophers. By the end of her book, we can almost see and smell the man, with all of his quirks and foibles and questioning brilliance."

—Walter Isaacson, *The New York Times Book Review*

"Bettany Hughes's terrifically readable life of Socrates is more than just a life; it is also an evocation and explanation of the world that created him, and over which he would come to have such influence . . . *The Hemlock Cup* makes a vivid and persuasive case for the study of Socrates as a valuable means to understanding how our way of thinking about our own world came to be, and a guide to how we might understand it better."

—*The Independent on Sunday* (UK)

"A beguiling book . . . Hughes triumphs again. This is history, and historical reconstruction, exactly as it should be written . . . The Socrates Hughes creates is ultimately a towering yet intensely human figure. He lives and speaks again in these pages: It's a singular accomplishment."

—*The Washington Post*

“Delightful . . . Hughes presents a high-octane account of Socrates and his age . . . *Do* read this book, both because of its marvelous storytelling and because it will stimulate a desire to learn more about the ancient world.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

“Bettany Hughes has done it again; she brings to life not only Socrates himself but the whole of Periclean Athens. Here is a work of dazzling erudition which remains hugely readable—what more can one ask?”

—John Julius Norwich, author of *Byzantium*

“No one before Bettany Hughes, a highly accomplished communicator, has thought to weave Socrates’s examined life into quite so rich and dense a tapestry of democratic Athens’s teeming high-cultural and mundane experience . . . Hughes’s enormous energy and enthusiasm are infectious.”

—Paul Cartledge, *The Independent* (UK)

“An invigorating, tremendous work of scholarship . . . A smart and entertaining ‘biography’ of Socrates as shaped against the great experiment of democracy in 5th-century BCE Athens . . . Hughes thrillingly navigates the life stages of her subject.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

“A compelling study of an exceptional man’s relationship with the one community that had a hope of understanding and accepting him. There’s some terrific and passionate writing about a philosopher whose heroism is unquestionable; and as lively and learned an introduction to classical Athens as you could want.”

—*The Daily Telegraph* (UK)

“This is a lucid, erudite, and compelling work that brings Socrates and his city to life, offering a fresh and illuminating perspective on their times . . . A fruitful melding of informed and nuanced historical narrative and personal observation that succeeds marvelously in realizing its bold ambition.”

—*Weekly Standard*

“The brilliant cultural historian Hughes has again produced an intriguing and entertaining biohistory of one of the most important individuals in the ancient world . . . She brings to life the social, political, economic, literary, and military realities of Socrates’ society, in particular the centrality of the agora, [and] aptly conveys the continuing urgency of Socrates’ devotion to the inquiring mind.”

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—*Booklist*

“One can plunge enthusiastically into the seething world inhabited by Socrates that Hughes recreates for us . . . This is the grand sweep of Athenian history during its most politically inventive and culturally exciting period . . . Irresistible.”

—*Literary Review* (UK)

“The life of Socrates becomes a peg from which to hang a vivid depiction of Athens in its golden age, from

the pinnacle of its greatness to the abyss of its ultimate defeat . . . Hughes's prose is the literary equivalent of CGI, re-creating for the reader a sense of the clamour and dazzle of the classical city that has rarely been bettered . . . Hers is an ancient Greece that is authentically cutting-edge."

—*The Observer* (UK)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Norman Williams:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or read a book called *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life*? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You recognize beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have some other opinion?

Mark Copeland:

Why? Because this *The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life* is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap it but latter it will distress you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book next to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such incredible way makes the content within easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This phenomenal book will give you a lot of advantages than the other book have such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking way. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I have been you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

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