

[1949. In Collier's Encyclopedia. New York: P.F. Collier and Son.]

ECLECTICISM, in philosophy, a variety of thought characterized by its adoption of principles from various or diverse systems of thought without intention of fusing those principles into a coherent system. The term is used ordinarily to connote superficiality rather than profundity. Although this connotation is often justified, eclecticism has also marked the thought of keen critical minds unwilling to accept all of the premises or all of the conclusions of any one philosophical system. Syncretism, an outgrowth of eclecticism, is a variety of philosophical thought according to which an attempt is made to combine elements taken from different systems of thought and, thus, to form a new system.

There is hardly an example of pure eclecticism among philosophers, though the eclectic spirit has existed from very ancient times, as, for instance, in the fifth century B.C. in the work of Diogenes of Apollonia. Late in the second century B.C., however, there developed a school of philosophy which, within the limits suggested above, could properly be called Eclectic. Directed largely against Epicureanism, this so-called Eclectic School adopted elements from Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism, making small effort to fuse the elements of the principles it employed. Though the extent of their eclecticism varied widely, it is customary to speak of Panaetius, Posidonius, the two Quintus Sextuses, Sotion of Alexandria, and Cicero (106-43 F.C.), as members of the Eclectic School. Of all these, the least syncretistic and most purely eclectic was Cicero, in whose graceful and forceful writings there is virtually no attempt to systematize or reconcile the principles employed. In contrast to Cicero, Panaetius and Posidonius attempted, if inadequately, to fuse the adopted elements and create a new Stoicism, and it is, therefore, perhaps more accurate to speak of their developments of Stoicism as syncretistic rather than eclectic.

Eclecticism, though it has flourished at various times in the history of philosophy, has had small influence and less continuity. The early Church Fathers Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c.215) and Origen (c.185-c.254); the eighteenth-century German philosophers and critics Friedrich Wolf (1759-1824) and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786); and the nineteenth-century French philosophers Victor Cousin (1792-1867), leader

of the so-called *Ecole eclectique*, F.M.C. de Remusat (1797-1875), Theodore Jouffroy (1796-1842), and Adolphe Garnier (1801-1864) were all eclectics, though the extent of their eclecticism varied as widely as did the motives and general characteristics of their beliefs.

Eclecticism, to a greater or lesser degree, is thus characteristic of the inquiry into the nature of things by men who see as fruitless the erection of new systems of the graves of old ones, and who believe that man's limited means of knowledge reduces his philosophical problem to the choice of particular principles with which to attack particular problems.

Eclecticism in Art. The formation of a style of art from a combination of features or qualities of style, each presumable the best of its kind, is known as "eclecticism." Such a style is represented by the paintings of the Carracci in the sixteenth century and of Benjamin West (1738-1820). G.H.CL.