

Lecture 19: Socrates and Greek philosophical dissent



HIST 190

Greek Philosophers

Sophists (5 th century B.C.E.)	Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.)	Plato (427-347 B.C.E.)	Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Men of wisdom" • Measured everything by its usefulness • Criticized gods, government, and conventional morality • There is no absolute truth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is absolute truth – "Know thyself" – Socratic dialogue • Convicted of corrupting the youth – forced to drink hemlock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dialogues</i> written record of Socrates' dialogues • <i>The Republic</i> – ideal state administered by philosophers • Founded the Academy which lasted 800 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macedonian student of Plato • Tutor to Alexander the Great • Opened the Lyceum in Athens • Created the basis for scientific inquiry 

Socrates (469-399 BCE)

- son of a stone carver
 - served as a hoplite in the Athenian army during the war with Sparta
 - friends with Xenophon and Aristophanes and Alcibiades
 - went around barefoot, seldom bathed
- 406 voted against condemning Athenian generals for malfeasance

What did Socrates actually say?

The short answer is: We don't know.

What we know comes mainly from his portrayals in

- **Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes.**
- He may well have said that he was wiser than other Athenians in so far as he recognized where he was ignorant
- He seems to have looked for explanations and arguments as the appropriate ways to justify actions
- sought "truth" as basis for right and authority other than "might makes right"

The demise of Socrates

- never wrote
- orally taught through dialogue, conversation or questions
- taught publically to question authority
- student Plato wrote several "dialogues" that feature words of Socrates
 - only record we have of Socrates (truthful?)

Context of Socrates' Trial and Death

- Athens is defeated by Sparta (404 BCE)
- Who is to blame? Scapegoat needed
- Conspicuous traitor: Alcibiades, a student of Socrates
 - Alcibiades: beautiful, rich young man
 - betrays Athens to Sparta, to the Persians
- Conclusion: Socrates is guilty of "corrupting the youth." (399 BCE)

Alcibiades in Plato's *Apology*

- "For he makes me confess that I ought not to live as I do, neglecting the wants of my own soul, and busying myself with the concerns of the Athenians; therefore I hold my ears and tear myself away from him. And he is the only person who ever made me ashamed, which you might think not to be in my nature, and there is no one else who does the same."

Alcibiades in Plato's *Apology*

For I know that I cannot answer him or say that I ought not to do as he bids, but when I leave his presence the love of popularity gets the better of me. And therefore I run away and fly from him, and when I see him I am ashamed of what I have confessed to him."

Al's "Desire" to kill Socrates

"Many a time have I wished that he were dead, and yet I know that I should be much more sorry than glad, if he were to die: so that I am at my wit's end."



Francesco Hayez, *Socrates discovers Alcibiades in the women's quarters* ca. 1815

Alcibiades' failure

- Focus on material world
 - Wealth, popularity, pleasure, a beautiful body
- These are shadows of the true Reality
 - =Beauty, Truth, Good in itself
 - =true Love of Philos-Sophos: Soul over Body
- Alcibiades' false love – like the violent love that blinds us (Sophocles on Aphrodite)
- Philosophical love saves us from this

10

Historical Truth of Socrates' Argument

- Why did Athens lose the war?
- Internal division of society continues
- Rich, slave-owners betray the city to Sparta
 - Alcibiades
- Athens puts wealth first, rather than virtue
- > City is divided, falls
- > Socrates is the true patriot

11

Argument of Crito

- 1) Crito's appeal to Socrates: save yourself (family, friends, etc.)
- 2) S: We must not do anything wrong. Right?
- 3) C: What could be wrong with fleeing an unjust sentence?
- 4) S: Imagine putting this question to the Laws, and having them reply.

12

The Laws are your true parents

- "Are we not, first, your parents? Through us your father took your mother and begat you. Tell us, have you any fault with those of us that are the laws of marriage? "I have none," I should reply. "Or have you any fault to find with those of us that regulate the nurture and education of the child, which you, like others, received? Did we not do well in bidding your father educate you in music and gymnastics?" (Plato's *Crito*)

13

Nature of Law

- The laws give us birth, education.
- We can change states, choose other laws.
- We actively participate in law-making.
- => Voluntary agreement with the Laws (like a contract in business)

14

Was Socrates Unjustly Condemned?

- The procedure of the law has not been violated.
- Even if the court makes a mistake in judgment, it does so according to the Laws and so must be obeyed.
- Otherwise the laws we ourselves create are destroyed.

15

Who frees the prisoner?

- “And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look toward the light, he will suffer sharp pains ...”

16

Relation of Virtue to Wealth

- The command of the Oracle at Delphi
- And I think that no better piece of fortune has ever befallen you in Athens than my service to God. For I spend my whole life in going about and persuading you all to give your first and chiefest care to the perfection of your souls, and not till you have done that to think of your bodies, or your wealth; and telling you that virtue does not come from wealth, but that wealth, and every other good thing which men have, whether in public, or in private, comes from virtue. (Apology)

17

Plato (427-347 BCE)

- Wrote dialogues in defiance of the arrest of his teacher Socrates
- Concerned with justice, virtue, character and the human soul
- First to unify a system of thought in the Western world
- Philosophy is not a vocation but a way of life
- intellectual ability and moral goodness
 - to pursue the good and the truth

Plato's Philosophy

- The only good life or the life worth living is reasoned by your own mind—not other's ideas or opinions
- Examine Life, history ideas. Once you've self examined, then you are ready for knowledge
- All knowledge begins with not knowing. To state "I don't know" is the first step to open learning

Plato's Philosophy

- Everything has a "truth" or an essence. The life of a philosopher is to seek this truth.
- A good teacher will spark you—lead you to discover truth with integrity; reason with imagination.
- Virtue is excellence:
 - doing your best
 - reaching your highest potential for good

Plato's Philosophy

- All humans have the potential for virtue, goodness and to shape good character.
- That potential rests in the human (*nous*—soul) and everyone is born with one.
- Character is what develops from the nous, and is constantly molded and textured and shaped.

Plato's Philosophy

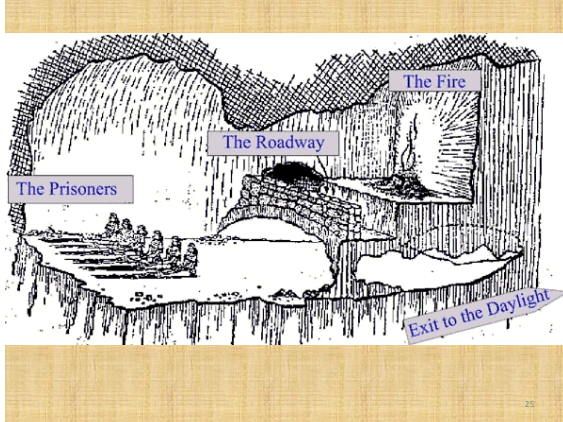
- Seeing is NOT believing
- can be distracted by our senses
- society is our ultimate teacher
- may produce errors and evils and wrong values
 - previous generations may have been transmitted bad ideas and practices

Plato's Philosophy

- "Education is the conversion that leads us out of the darkness of the cave and into the light.
 - Type of awakening (enlightenment)
- We recollect, develop knowledge and seek well being, happiness and virtue
- "The good man makes you better, not worse."

Allegory of the Cave

- Ordinary "knowledge" – sensuous, opinionated
 - Focus on wealth, pleasure, particular beauty
 - Recall: the problem raised by trade: X amount of corn = Y amount of wine = \$20
- Ascent of knowledge to true reality
 - The value that equates the two different objects is not on the surface, but on another level
- > virtue, the Beautiful, the Good, the True
- Returns to the cave
 - They will kill him



Plato's Academy

founded in 388 or 387 BCE

- in a public garden for gymnastic purposes
- donated to Athens by Academus
 - the Academy
- small garden and sign that read:
 - “Let no one unversed in geometry enter here.”
- Plato buried there
- Institution lasted more than 900 years
 - closed by Byzantine Emperor Justinian in 529 CE

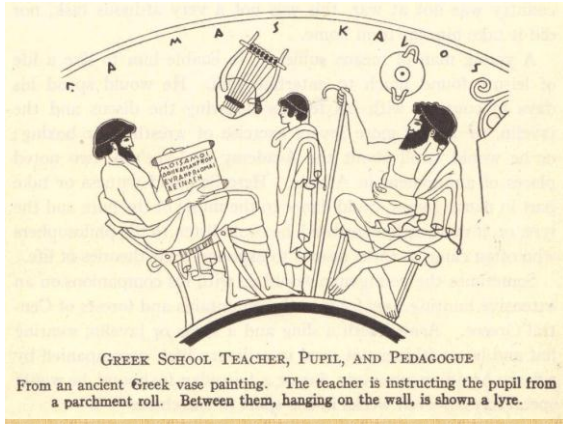
Course of Study

Basic training of the mind

- 10 years of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy

Then

- 5 years of “dialectic”
 - art of conversation
 - of pursuing lines of questions and answers
- training to be able to reach the essence of things – at length in search of a first principle



Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

- Greek philosopher who lived and taught in Athens until the fall of Alexander the Great
- he fled for his life, "lest Athens sin twice against philosophy".
- The most famous student of Plato's, and the tutor of Alexander the Great.

Aristotle's Works

- Aristotle is credited with writing the first systematic treatises in many fields, including physics, biology, politics, poetics, ethics, logic, etc. In most cases, these treatises were composed by his students, using lecture notes.
- *Nicomachean Ethics* is an exception.

Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*

- book was written by Aristotle himself for his son Nicomachus
- he tries to explain, as far as possible in a book, what makes for a good life for human beings.
- Along the way, he introduces some famous ethical doctrines, such as the doctrine of the mean between extremes, and the notion of virtue.



Raphael, *School of Athens* (1510)

Aftermath of the Persian Wars

The old system of mutually exclusive, independent *poleis* no longer worked

- was freedom of Greece as a whole compatible with freedoms of disparate city-states?

A single *polis* was needed to lead:

- **Sparta** (logical choice) was protective and insular
 - could not be away from farms too long
- **Athens** had resources and was located logically to continue the defense
